'Floating pipelines'

Nation becomes powerhouse in building LNG tanker fleet

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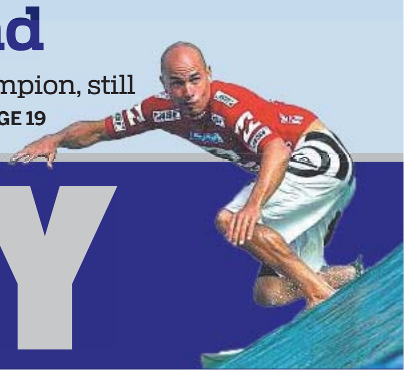


CHINA DAILY

WEDNESDAY, May 31, 2023 中国日报 chinadaily.com.cn RMB **¥2**

Xi highlights key national security tasks

Meeting says nation must be prepared to deal with every type of eventuality

By MO JINGXI
mojingxi@chinadaily.com.cn

President Xi Jinping has urged greater efforts to accelerate the modernization of China's national security system and capacity in order to better safeguard the country's development amid complicated and challenging circumstances.

Xi, who is also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, made the remarks on Tuesday while presiding over the first meeting of the National Security Commission under the 20th CPC Central Committee.

Xi, who is head of the commission, called for correctly grasping major national security issues and urged efforts to safeguard China's new pattern of development with a new security architecture and break new ground on national security work.

It was noted at the meeting that China is currently faced with increasingly complicated and arduous national security issues.

It is necessary to be fully aware of China's advantages and favorable conditions, be prepared to deal with worst-case and extreme scenarios, and be ready to withstand challenging and dangerous scenarios, said a statement released after the meeting.

The commission was established in November 2013 to improve the national security system and strategies to guarantee the country's national security, according to a communique issued after the Third Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee.

Participants in Tuesday's meeting said that the commission has been committed to carrying forward the fighting spirit and developing a holistic approach to national security, has resolutely safeguarded national sovereignty, security and development interests, and has strengthened national security on all fronts.

They underlined the importance of modernizing China's national security system and capacity, saying that emphasis should be placed on promoting the integration of all aspects.

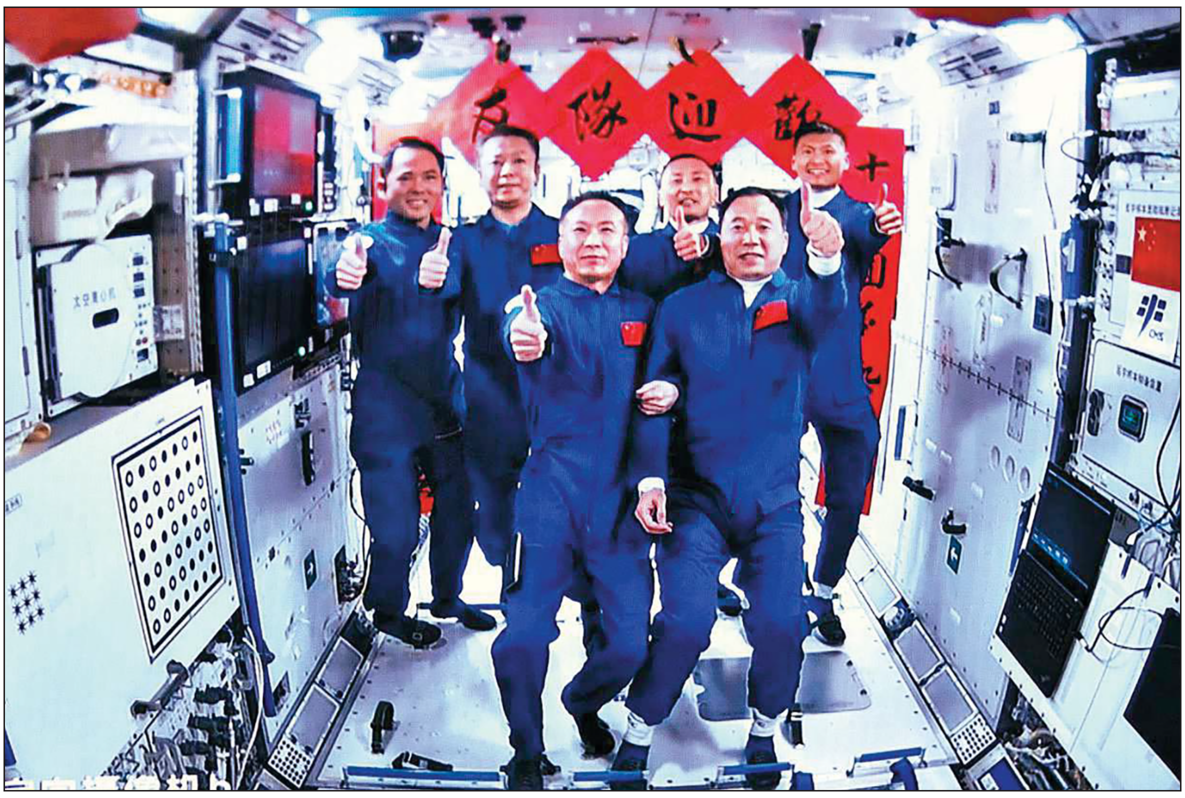
It was pointed out that efforts should be made to create a favorable external security environment for the country and to promote the deep integration of development and security.

Reforms of methods and means used to safeguard and shape national security must be advanced by leveraging technologies, according to the meeting.

The meeting's participants also said China should better respond to national security risks through real-time monitoring and early warning systems, improve security governance on internet data and artificial intelligence, and intensify national security education.

Tuesday's meeting reviewed and adopted documents including a guideline on speeding up the construction of a national security risk monitoring and early warning system.

Li Qiang, Zhao Leji and Cai Qi, who are all members of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee and deputy heads of the commission, attended the meeting.



The Shenzhou XV and Shenzhou XVI crews pose in the Tianhe core module of the Tiangong space station on Tuesday, marking the start of the in-orbit crew handover, in this screen grab from the Beijing Aerospace Control Center. LI JIE / XINHUA

Astronauts meet in Tiangong space station core module

By ZHAO LEI
at Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center
zhaolei@chinadaily.com.cn

The Shenzhou XVI mission crew, which includes the first Chinese civilian astronaut, reached orbit on Tuesday and started work in the Tiangong space station.

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Aboard the Shenzhou XVI spacecraft, mission commander Major General Jing Haipeng, spaceflight engineer Colonel Zhu Yangzhu and Professor Gui Haichao, the mission's science payload specialist and the first Chinese civilian in space, were launched by a 20-story-tall Long March 2F carrier rocket, which blasted off at 9:31 am from the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center in northwestern China's Gobi Desert.

After a short flight, the 8-metric-ton spaceship was placed into a low-Earth orbit about 400 kilometers above the planet and then activated the rapid rendezvous-docking mode to approach the Tiangong station.

On Tuesday afternoon, the spacecraft connected with the radial port on Tiangong's Tianhe core module.

After about two hours of preparatory work following the docking, Jing opened a hatch on the Shenzhou XVI spaceship and floated into Tianhe's connection cabin at 6:19 pm.

He was welcomed by Major General Fei Junlong, leader of the Shenzhou XV crew, who had been waiting inside the cabin.

"Let's hug! I am so happy!" Fei said as he embraced Jing.

Following Jing, Zhu and Gui moved into the connection cabin one by one, and they were also greeted and hugged by Fei.

The Shenzhou XVI trio then moved into the Tianhe module and hugged the other Shenzhou XV crew members — Senior Colonel Deng Qingming and Senior Colonel Zhang Lu — who were waiting there and recording the emotional moment on a smartphone.

The two crews chatted for a while before taking a group selfie to applause from the ground control staff.

The entire procedure was broadcast live on China Central Television.

The two teams are scheduled to stay together for about five days, and the Shenzhou XVI crew will then take over the massive orbital outpost from Fei's team, who have been in orbit for six months and will return to Earth as scheduled.

Jing and his crew members will stay in Tiangong for around five months and are scheduled to return to Earth in November. They will carry out several spacewalks during the mission to mount equipment outside the station and also conduct maintenance work, Lin Xiqiang, deputy director of the China Manned Space Agency, said at a news conference on Monday.

Other major tasks will include assisting with the docking and departure of visiting spacecraft such as cargo ships and a space-based telescope, conducting scientific experiments and demonstrations of technology, and hosting science lectures, Lin said.

The official said he expects that new scientific data in a wide range of research fields such as general relativity and the origins of life will be obtained during the Shenzhou XVI mission.

The journey is the debut flight of China's third generation of astronauts, and the first time a Chinese civilian has traveled into space.

Jing and Zhu are members of the People's Liberation Army's Astronaut Division, while Gui is a doctoral supervisor at the Department of Spacecraft and Launch Vehicle Technology of Beihang University's School of Astronautics in Beijing.

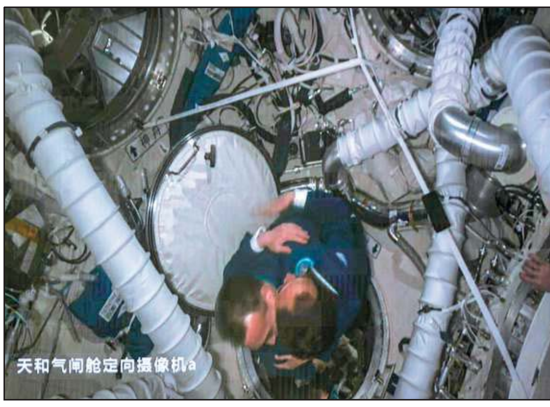
Lin said that after stringent training, all of the third-generation astronauts have passed qualification tests and have been cleared for space missions.

Moreover, the Shenzhou XVI mission is Jing's fourth spaceflight, making him China's most experienced astronaut.

According to Lin, China now has all prerequisites for sending foreign astronauts into space — a well-constructed space station, a reliable astronaut transportation system, and mature methods for astronauts' training and support.

"We are actively working on this matter. I very much welcome and look forward to foreign astronauts flying on board our space station," he said.

One of the world's largest and most advanced spacecraft, Tiangong currently consists of three major components, the Tianhe core module and the Wentian and Mengtian science lab modules, and it is connected to three visiting vessels, the Shenzhou XV and Shenzhou XVI crew craft and the Tianzhou 6 cargo ship.



Jing Haipeng and Fei Junlong, commanders of the Shenzhou XVI and XV missions, respectively, hug after meeting in the Tianhe core module. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

The Shenzhou XVI spacecraft is launched at 9:31 am on Tuesday from the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center. GU JIANWEN / FOR CHINA DAILY

HOME ORGANIZERS SET THEIR SIGHTS ON CLUTTER

Advice offered to clients during livestreaming sessions

By ZHOU WENTING in Shanghai
zhouwenting@chinadaily.com.cn

indepth

Han Yi'en, a home space organizer based in Shanghai, spends 14 hours each week preparing for and hosting three livestreaming sessions related to her work.

Although she has offered training services since 2015, she said livestreaming work is far more demanding.

"Hosts can take a short break during offline courses by asking students to think for themselves and hold discussions. However, for online classes, far more energy is required to impart knowledge, and hosts must be able to adapt to different situations during classes," said Han, who started livestreaming in May last year.

"Some audiences just randomly switch to livestreaming, and if they don't find anything that interests them right away, they will not return," she said.

*See **Organizers,** page 2*

INSIDE

'Youth' gets Gen Z revamp

Z Weekly, pages 16-18

HIGHER GROUND

Proactive measures urged to sustain inflow of FDI

By ZHONG NAN and **LIU ZHIHUA**

China should adopt more effective measures to sustain the inflow of foreign direct investment this year amid growing external challenges, ranging from geoeconomic fragmentation to a gloomy global economic outlook, experts and business leaders said on Tuesday.

While acknowledging the country's appeal to global investors due to its strong and stable long-term economic fundamentals, they said the government still has room to provide a better policy environment for foreign companies.

This would entail considering the diverse situations and conditions across different regions, particularly when implementing policies related to industrial growth plans, infrastructure construction and connectivity, they added.

More than 80 percent of the 600-plus foreign companies surveyed in the first quarter by the Beijing-based China Council for the Promotion of International Trade expect their profit margins from investment in China to stay the same or rise this year.

Over 90 percent of the respondents anticipate their profit margins from investment in China to be stable or increase in the next five years.

At a news conference on Tuesday, Wang Linjie, a spokeswoman for the council, said the Yangtze River and Pearl River delta regions and the Chengdu-Chongqing region are the main areas attracting foreign capital.

"Expanding production lines and achieving digital transformation are the primary ways for foreign enterprises to increase investment in China," she said.

*See **FDI,** page 3*

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VISIT…

LANZAROTE Caliente.com

Organizers: Wider audience reached

From page 1

Livestreaming has helped professionals such as Han reach a broader audience. During the past year, more than 1 million people have watched her broadcasts.

The profession of home space organizer, which emerged in the United States and was developed further in Japan, was recognized by China's Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security in January 2021.

Practitioners said that in Shanghai, for example, the average fee charged by a team of three organizers is typically about 1,000 yuan ($144) per hour. Rates may vary in different regions.

New jobs have emerged in the field of home space organization, including those for lecturers and live broadcasters.

Zhang Chao, general manager of Yi'en Home Space Organization, which has produced nearly 2,500 organizers, said these new jobs provide practitioners with fresh career possibilities and demonstrate the continued vitality of the industry in facing different demands from the public.

"Individual customers and businesses, including storage and recycling enterprises, will be interested in learning about the consumption habits of consumers in different regions," Zhang said.

"We have helped organizers become lecturers for businesses and also to set up their own video accounts," he said, adding that tests are arranged for lecturers twice a year. Those who register for a test must organize space in clients' homes for a total of at least 150 hours.

Yi'en Home Space Organization recognizes nearly 150 lecturers and five broadcasters, and is preparing to recognize more. They will be involved in standard home space organization in different cities and will judge competitions in the industry.

"More than two-thirds of the organizers we have trained hold bachelor degrees and have high expectations for their career development. New job opportunities help them broaden their horizons," Zhang said.

Han, the organizer in Shanghai, said her live broadcasts include entry-level introductions for those interested in this work, and also for new entrepreneurs or professionals who have bought class packages. For entry-level learners, she usually starts with the basic principles.

"For example, they are asked to quickly arrange two areas of a closet for the clothes they wear and for those they seldom wear. For those that they wear, they must decide on which items to hang up and on those to be stacked," Han said.

Guo Zhenhua (left), a home organizer in Shanghai, works at a client's home with a colleague. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

"It is important to allocate a space comprising about 10 percent of the closet area, so that if the wrong piece of clothing is taken in haste one morning and they don't know where to put it back, it can initially be placed in this space and dealt with later."

Xie Jin, 26, has worked as a full-time home space organizer in her hometown of Taizhou city, Zhejiang province, for two years. Next month, she will conduct her first lecture in a local community to share details of her work with residents.

A former accountant, Xie said she has done housekeeping since childhood, as she enjoys performing such work quietly by herself.

Before becoming a home space organizer, she was pessimistic about many things.

"But learning about my new work and organizing my own space gave me the opportunity to take a close look at myself to see what I needed to change. I now often tell myself to stay true to my aspirations and to lead a happy life," Xie said.

> There is usually a vast disparity between the wife's possessions and the husband's. For example, the man's clothes typically account for only one-fifth of the space, or even less, in a closet."
>
> **Luo Yi,** a home space organizer in Wuhan, Hubei province

Schools included

In May last year, the Ministry of Education announced that household space organization and arrangement had become part of the curriculum in primary and junior middle schools.

Organizers said parents and schools have shown increased interest in passing on the knowledge and skills required for this work to children.

Tong Tong, a home space organizer from Zhenjiang city, Jiangsu province, said she and her team have provided classes at more than 10 schools — from preschools to universities — and at over 30 extracurricular institutions.

"I think that to a certain extent it's more important for kindergarten children to learn to organize and arrange their own stuff than to learn characters," said Tong, the mother of a primary school pupil.

"Organizing space is not only about what we do with our hands — it's about providing a sense of order and making choices. Such skills benefit a child for a lifetime," she added.

Tong and her team teach kindergarten children to fold items of clothing, while primary school children are taught to arrange their schoolbags and desks neatly.

"We guide middle school students in deciding what to accept and reject in daily life, and for university students, we talk about their future career plans and life development," Tong said.

Wu Hao, who teaches accounting at an occupational school in Shanghai, became a part-time home space organizer for couples with children three years ago.

She noticed that some of her students did not distinguish between public and personal areas when placing their possessions in classrooms and dormitories. She also found that these students lacked a sense of order in their studies and daily life, and were short of self-confidence.

"When we help a family with home space organization, we see both the physical changes in a space and also sense how members of the family are changing the way in which they think," Wu said.

"We often say the condition of a person's room is a reflection of his or her inner self. What to place in the home, and where to place it, are linked to personal likes and dislikes, and also relationships between the family members," she said.

Several home space organizers said such work is not only about possessions, but also concerns relationships between people. Organizers are usually called in when clients have reached a certain turning point in their lives.

Male recruits

The number of male workers in the industry is rising. Part of the reason is that they view home space organization from a male perspective, better meeting the expectations of the man in the house, which are usually different from that of the woman.

Luo Yi, 40, a home space organizer in Wuhan, Hubei province, said that after visiting homes, he quickly discovers why some wives complain that their husbands spend so much time at work and on socializing, instead of staying at home. This is because the amount of space at home is limited.

"There is usually a vast disparity between the wife's possessions and the husband's. For example, the man's clothes typically account for only one-fifth of the space, or even less, in a closet," said Luo, a former salesman who has been an organizer for three years.

"Male organizers are more aware of this, so they will make more space for the husband in the home so that he will feel better respected and have an area of his own to relax in."

As the majority of organizers are women, the addition of men to a team may result in a more gender-balanced view being taken.

Men are also generally more adept than women at repair work, Luo said. For example, they can better adjust smart furniture and arrange a closet based on their personal requirements.

Luo said the experience he has gained from his work has inspired him to help more individuals and families.

"Traditional values encourage men to work hard at their jobs, and my work has allowed me to take a closer look at families and rearrange my work and family priorities. As a result, I now have more time to spend with my child," he said.

However, the founder of Shounabang, which translates roughly as "home space organizing helper", which was established in Shanghai in 2019, said he prefers women when looking for employees, as many clients do not want male home space organizers. Shounabang now operates nationwide, earning monthly revenue of nearly 300,000 yuan.

The founder, who only wanted to be identified as Fan, his surname, said most of Shounabang's clients are women, who may feel insecure when men work in their homes. Many women also still feel that men are not as careful as they are, Fan added.

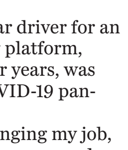
"As this work involves private belongings, it's more convenient for women organizers to work for female clients," he said.

However, as male clients generally have a weaker sense of the boundaries of their personal belongings, they will not decline the services of women organizers, he said.

Left and center: Tong Tong, a home organizer, teaches primary school and college students in Zhenjiang, Jiangsu province, how to arrange their possessions. **Right:** Home organizer Han Yi'en hosts a livestreaming session in Shanghai related to her work, PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

My career change provides a welcome sense of order and happiness

Guo Zhenhua,
38, home space organizer in Shanghai



Two years ago, my work as a luxury car driver for an online ride-hailing platform, which I did for four years, was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

I considered changing my job, as I am a practical person and enjoy keeping things tidy.

As I do all the housework at home and am obsessed with cleaning, I decided to become a home space organizer

I have gained a strong sense of happiness and achievement, as clients can quickly see the results of my work.

I worked in the army for two years, a role that required discipline and order. There were stringent requirements on where certain items could be placed.

A popular television show in Shanghai focused on renovating people's homes — usually extremely small properties — to meet the daily needs of a big family. As a home space organizer, I am happy to fulfill such a role.

One case I dealt with involved a couple with impaired hearing who lived with their two children and the husband's mother. Their apartment occupied less than 30 square meters, and my colleagues and I had to edge our way carefully past boxes and other items when entering their home.

In rearranging the space, we created an area in the middle of the bedroom so that the toddler had a mat to crawl on and his elder sister had a bed of her own. The girl used to share the lower bunk of a bed with her grandmother, as the upper bunk was full of possessions.

After we finished our work, the couple said they were able to use all the basic functional areas in their home for the first time.

We guide clients in keeping possessions that are useful and valuable to them in daily life, or to which they are emotionally attached.

Many people are initially hesitant about using our services. However, they warm to our work when they begin to see changes to their rooms, as they prefer a comfortable and tidy space to live in.

I suggest that people regularly organize the space in their home. This work can be likened to those who need to burn calories after continually eating food, in order to avoid becoming obese.

I believe male and female organizers have their respective advantages. For example, males are more familiar with tools and electrical devices, while females are better equipped to deal with women's clothing and cosmetics.

After visiting many homes crammed with far more possessions than the occupants need, I am trying to make my own life as clutter-free as possible.

I now have little desire to obtain possessions — for example, I only buy four pairs of shoes a year and wear simple clothes.

Guo Zhenhua was talking to Zhou Wenting.

TOP NEWS

Antelope migration

Pregnant Tibetan antelopes cross a section of the Qinghai-Tibet Highway in Hoh Xil, Qinghai province. A growing number of female antelopes are migrating to the heart of northwestern China's Hoh Xil National Nature Reserve to give birth, according to the reserve's management bureau. Under the first-class State protection in China, the once-endangered species is now mostly found in Tibet autonomous region, Qinghai province and Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region. Their population has increased over the past three decades, thanks to the ban on illegal hunting and other measures implemented to improve their habitat.
ZHANG HONGXIANG / XINHUA

Defense minister to attend key security dialogue in Singapore

Top official to set out China's position on world peace, regional stability issues

By JIANG CHENGLONG
jiangchenglong@chinadaily.com.cn

The attendance of China's defense minister at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore will be vital to expound China's vision on global and regional stability, experts said.

It will also offer an opportunity for various parties to seek security proposals that serve the common interests of regional countries, instead of the self-interest of the United States that aims to maintain military hegemony in the Asia-Pacific region, they said.

State Councilor and Minister of National Defense Li Shangfu has been invited to attend the 20th Shangri-La Dialogue and visit Singapore from Wednesday to Sunday, the Defense Ministry announced on Monday.

During the international security forum, Li will deliver a speech on China's new security proposals and meet with the heads of some delegations. During his visit to Singapore he will also hold meetings and talks with leaders of the nation's government and its defense department, said Tan Kefei, spokesman for the ministry.

Li's attendance at the Shangri-La Dialogue, which is scheduled to be held from Friday to Sunday, will be his first time participating in the event since taking office as China's defense minister in March. It is the fourth time China has sent its defense minister to take part in the international security forum held by London-based think tank the International Institute for Strategic Studies.

Senior Colonel Cao Yanzhong, a researcher at the People's Liberation Army Academy of Military Science, said the defense minister's participation will convey to the international community China's views on world peace and regional security issues, strengthen communication and understanding with relevant countries, including neighboring countries, and build security consensus with them.

In addition, Western countries led by the US could possibly utilize the conference to whip up international public opinion that is not conducive to China, such as hyping up the so-called "China threat theory", he said.

"Therefore, it is necessary for China to attend the conference to refute this and gain more understanding and recognition from the global community," he said.

According to the Pentagon, US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin will also attend the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore.

Engagement between the Chinese and US militaries has long been a global focus but it has gone through serious difficulties as the US side has been infringing on China's interests, said Yuan Zheng, deputy director of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of American Studies.

"As Sino-US ties have been getting strained, relations between the two militaries will inevitably take a hit," he said, noting that China does not reject dialogue, but the US has created difficulties for dialogue, which it has to take concrete actions to overcome.

But at present, the US is increasing its military presence in the Western Pacific, treating China as an imaginary enemy, constantly sending warships through the Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea, and selling arms to Taiwan, which shows no sincerity, Yuan said.

Mao Ning, a Foreign Ministry spokeswoman, said on Tuesday that the US is clear about the reason why China-US military dialogue faces difficulties.

"The US should earnestly respect China's sovereignty, security and interest concerns, immediately correct wrong practice, show sincerity and create the necessary atmosphere and conditions for dialogue and communication between the Chinese and US militaries," Mao said.

According to the outline agenda of the conference, there will be two plenary sessions respectively themed on China and the US — the only two among the forum's all seven plenary sessions which focus exclusively on a single country's security policy.

The theme of the US plenary session will be Washington's leadership in the so-called "Indo-Pacific" region.

Whether the US has a leadership role in the Asia-Pacific region isn't determined by itself, but whether its security policies serve the common interests of regional countries, Cao said.

The US has been creating military alliances in the Asia-Pacific and bringing in countries outside the region to intervene in South China Sea affairs, which is essentially targeted at suppressing China, he said.

However, the new security framework that China advocates is comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable, he stressed, noting that all countries' sovereignty and territorial integrity as well as all parties' legitimate security concerns would be respected under the framework.

Global political figures laud nation's growth path

By CAO DESHENG in Wuhan
caodesheng@chinadaily.com.cn

Political figures from around the world have hailed the Chinese path to modernization led by the Communist Party of China, saying it creates opportunities for the world and encourages more developing countries to pursue a modernization drive suited to their national conditions.

They made the comments on Tuesday at an event in Wuhan, capital of Hubei province, held to showcase the province's achievements in implementing Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era. More than 170 representatives from 36 political parties in about 30 countries attended the gathering.

The Chinese Path toward Modernization: New Thinking to Break New Ground — is part of events organized by the International Department of the CPC Central Committee to promote the Party's theories and practices in governing the world's most-populous country.

Odontuya Saldan, vice-chair of the State Great Hural of Mongolia and chair of the Democratic Women's Union of the Democratic Party of Mongolia, said her visit to Hubei had enabled her to witness a good model of Chinese modernization as presented by Xi Jinping, general secretary of the CPC Central Committee, in his report to the Party's 20th National Congress.

She spoke of Hubei's achievements in poverty alleviation through an innovation-driven strategy, saying Mongolia wants to learn from China's people-centered development philosophy and its successful experiences in poverty relief.

Agni Prasad Sapkota, vice-chairman of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Center) and former speaker of the House of Representatives of Nepal, said that he was impressed by the essential features of Chinese modernization.

Sapkota talked about his visit to several cities in the past few days, and said Hubei's achievements in growth, ecological conservation and cultural progress demonstrated the CPC's strong leadership.

While addressing the event, Liu Jianchao, minister of the International Department of the CPC Central Committee, said that the CPC strives to promote world peace and development.

The nation will continue to create new opportunities with its new development, and provide new options for developing countries in pursuing their modernization, Liu added.

Powerful endeavor

A segment of the unit 4 reactor at the Sanmen nuclear power plant is assembled on Monday in Taizhou, Zhejiang province. The plant is expected to have an installed capacity of 5 million kilowatts after the second phase, involving units 3 and 4, becomes operational. PAN KANJUN / XINHUA

NDB seeks to raise funds in diverse markets

By SHI JING in Shanghai
shijing@chinadaily.com.cn

The New Development Bank should diversify its financing channels and methods to facilitate the development of emerging economies, which will help drive global economic growth amid rising market challenges and uncertainties, said experts and officials attending the bank's two-day annual meeting, which started in Shanghai on Tuesday.

Raising funds in diverse markets and in different currencies, including the renminbi, the dollar and the euro, will be among the NDB's priorities, Dilma Rousseff, the bank's new president who was elected in March, said at the meeting.

Meanwhile, the NDB will seek to fund a greater share of projects in local currencies. As many infrastructure projects crucial for sustainable development generate revenues in local currencies, the NDB will offer more compatible alternatives for their financing, Rousseff said.

The move will better protect the bank's borrowers from the risks of currency fluctuations. This is especially important when the global market is complicated by multiple uncertainties such as geopolitical conflicts, fragmentation of supply chains, high inflation and monetary policies leading to rising interest rates, she said.

By the end of the first quarter, local-currency financing represented approximately 21.5 percent of the NDB's portfolio. According to the bank's 2022-26 strategy released this month, 30 percent of its project financing will be denominated in the national currencies of its members.

The NDB will also increase its participation in co-financing operations with other multilateral financial institutions, national development banks and the private sector, Rousseff said.

This is the NDB's eighth annual meeting, and the theme is "Shaping a New Era for Global Development".

China's Finance Minister Liu Kun said at the meeting that the NDB should innovate financing models and loan tools while leveraging resources more extensively. By making reasonable mapping in both sovereign and nonsovereign businesses, the NDB can better meet the diversified demand of member countries and facilitate their sustainable development.

Founded by Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa in 2014 with the purpose of mobilizing resources for infrastructure and sustainable development projects in emerging markets and developing countries, the NDB opened in July 2015, with its headquarters in Shanghai.

Aside from the five BRICS nations, the bank has included Bangladesh, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt and Uruguay on its list of members over the past few years.

Rousseff said on Tuesday that expanding the NDB's network of partnerships is also among its priorities, which will help diversify the bank's portfolio and increase its ability to mobilize funds.

According to a Financial Times report on Sunday, the NDB is holding talks to admit Saudi Arabia as its new member.

Since its establishment, the NDB has approved over $33.2 billion in loans for 98 projects in developing economies.

The bank announced on Monday its successful issuance of an 8.5 billion yuan ($1.2 billion) panda bond in the China interbank bond market to finance infrastructure and sustainable development projects that benefit NDB members and facilitate the bank's sustainable development goals.

This is also in line with the bank's goal to raise the ratio of local-currency financing, said Leslie Maasdorp, the NDB's vice-president and chief financial officer.

Panda bonds are yuan-denominated bonds issued by overseas institutions in the Chinese onshore market.

With a three-year tenure, the newly issued bond has surpassed the previous issuance size of 7 billion yuan, establishing a new benchmark panda bond transaction in the China interbank bond market, the NDB said in its announcement.

FDI: Foreign companies plan to expand investment

From page 1

The council will continue to provide better services for foreign companies, especially in the area of protection and use of intellectual property rights, Wang added.

Zhou Mi, a senior researcher at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation, said that China should make bolder efforts to further facilitate trade and investment, so that costs for foreign companies to conduct investment and trading activities in the country are reduced.

The government also needs to help these companies grow at a faster pace and in a more sustainable manner by increasing financial support and by improving legal and other professional services, such as intellectual property rights protection, apart from promoting a unified domestic market and increasing coordination of supply chains and logistic networks, he added.

Michael Hart, president of the American Chamber of Commerce in China, said there is still room for China to offer foreign companies a better business environment and services, especially in the areas of public procurement, standard establishment and IP protection.

US carmaker Tesla announced in April that it will build a new factory in Shanghai to manufacture its energy-storage product Megapack.

Upbeat about the Chinese market, Alexander Dony, chief sales and marketing officer of BSH Home Appliances Corp, a German manufacturer, said the group will increase its investment in China in multiple fields, including research and development and artificial intelligence.

"As China is a strong driving force behind global innovation, we must make early arrangements and expand our presence in these areas, as well as introduce new products with a wider price range to attract more consumers," Dony said.

Supported by a massive market, opening-up endeavors and an improving business environment, China's actual use of FDI grew by 2.2 percent year-on-year to 499.46 billion yuan ($70.55 billion) in the first four months, data from the Ministry of Commerce showed.

Contact the writers at zhongnan@chinadaily.com.cn

Musk supports steady Sino-US ties in meeting with FM

By ZHANG YUNBI
zhangyunbi@chinadaily.com.cn

State Councilor and Foreign Minister Qin Gang drew an analogy between driving a vehicle and Sino-US ties during his meeting on Tuesday with Elon Musk, visiting CEO of new energy vehicle giant Tesla.

For successful development of China-US ties, Qin told Musk in Beijing that the wheel should be steered properly to follow the path of mutual respect, peaceful coexistence and win-win cooperation outlined by President Xi Jinping.

The driver should step on the brake pedal to avoid the risks of dangerous driving and use the accelerator in order to advance mutually beneficial collaboration, he said.

Noting that China's growth offers opportunities to the whole world, Qin said that a "sound, steady and constructive China-US relationship" will not only benefit the two countries but also advance the interests of nations across the globe.

Musk said the Chinese people are intelligent and diligent, and the development of China has been natural. He said the interests of the US and China are highly intertwined, and his company doesn't support economic decoupling or moves that disrupt production and supply chains.

Tesla is willing to further expand its business in China and share the opportunities brought by China's development, he added.

The annual trade between the world's top two economies was close to $760 billion last year, according to data provided by China's General Administration of Customs and the Foreign Ministry.

Observers noted that Musk is visiting China at a time when Sino-US bilateral ties have suffered political tensions, and senior diplomatic, economic and trade officials have made contact or held meetings.

Last week, Minister of Commerce Wang Wentao met with US Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo and US Trade Representative Katherine Tai.

Diao Daming, an associate professor at the School of International Studies, Renmin University of China, said these positive developments clearly help send a signal of stability to the world.

"China has always believed that Sino-US cooperation is mutually beneficial, and cooperation is the only right choice," he added.

During a regular news briefing on Tuesday, Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said: "China always welcomes business figures from all countries, including Mr Musk, to visit China for a deeper understanding of the country and mutually beneficial cooperation."

China is firmly committed to advancing its high-level opening-up and fostering a market-oriented, law-based and internationalized business environment, she said.

CHINA

Guideline gives support to juveniles

Courts get green light to offer families education to better protect children

By **CAO YIN**
caoyin@chinadaily.com.cn

Chinese courts should educate divorcing parents to ensure their underage children can obtain care and support from their families, according to a new guideline.

The 24-article guideline on family education was issued by the Supreme People's Court, China's top court, and the All-China Women's Federation on Tuesday, aiming to offer stronger protection for children by urging their parents or guardians to fulfill their duties.

If juvenile delinquency or misconduct by children's guardians is discovered, courts will also be allowed to educate the family, said the guideline, which will take effect on Thursday.

The new legal document is part of efforts to implement the Family Education Promotion Law, which came into effect on Jan 1 last year and requires courts to educate parents or guardians during case handling if it is found that they behaved improperly.

To meet the requirement, many courts have issued "family education orders" to deal with cases involving juveniles to admonish the minors' guardians and urge them to fulfill their duties, Duan Nonggen, head of the top court's Research Office, told a news conference on Tuesday.

Citing data showing that 10,308 such orders were issued last year, he revealed that Chinese courts also established 838 institutes on their own or with other departments to promote family education over the past year.

In one case, the Tianxin District People's Court in Changsha, capital of Hunan province, ordered a divorced mother to live with her 8-year-old daughter, who had been forced to live with a nanny. It was the first ruling based on the law.

The district court also issued a family education order requiring the mother to take the girl to her home and live with her, and asking her to contact the girl's teacher at least once a week to keep up with her schooling. It also added that the mother could be admonished, fined or detained if she disobeys the order.

Duan said such family education orders have played a role in child protection, but confirming "in what cases judges could issue the orders and how to issue them needed to be standardized and regulated", which is why the guideline was released.

The guideline states that family education can be offered through various means including online courses or psychological counseling, clarifying that it can be provided at any stage of case handling, such as during trials or after a ruling is announced.

While requiring courts to explain why they issued family education orders, the guideline stipulated that the time, place and frequency of such education should also be specified in the orders.

If parents or guardians do not agree with the orders, they will be allowed to apply for a review within five days, it said.

In addition, the guideline calls for courts and women's federations to collaborate with government departments and social organizations to carry out more research on family education, encouraging them to establish working stations and set up a special team to focus on the education.

Death sentence upheld for son who killed mom

By **CAO YIN**

The death sentence handed down to a former Peking University student who killed his mother was upheld by the Fujian High People's Court on Wednesday.

The high court heard Wu Xieyu's appeal on May 19, more than 20 months after he was convicted of intentional homicide, fraud and the illegal purchase of identity cards. The 28-year-old was given the death penalty and fined 103,000 yuan ($14,600) by the Intermediate People's Court in Fuzhou, capital of Fujian province.

According to the original ruling, Wu thought the life of his 48-year-old mother, Xie Tianqin, was meaningless after his father died of an illness, so he prepared to kill her in early 2015 and bought items online for this purpose.

On July 10 that year, when Xie arrived home, Wu hit her repeatedly in the head and face with a dumbbell, resulting in her death. He fled the scene after wrapping her body in 75 layers, including bedsheets, plastic sheets and activated carbon bags.

To cover up the killing, Wu "borrowed" 1.44 million yuan from his relatives and friends, telling them he and his mother would need the money as she accompanied him while he traveled overseas to study. In reality, he squandered the money. To hide his identity and avoid arrest, he also purchased more than 10 ID cards.

The family became suspicious when Xie failed to contact them for an extended period of time. They found her body on Feb 14, 2016, in her faculty dormitory apartment at a middle school she worked at in Fuzhou.

Local police named Wu as a suspect and offered a reward for information leading to his arrest in March 2016. He was finally captured in Chongqing in April 2019 after being on the run for more than three years.

In December 2020, he stood trial at the intermediate court, and it handed down the death sentence against him in August 2021.

On Tuesday, the high court said that after considering the facts, it came to the same conclusion as the intermediate court, pointing out that Wu's behavior constituted the crimes of intentional homicide, fraud and the illegal purchase of ID cards.

"His killing was premeditated, and he purchased tools to prepare for the crime," the high court said. "The method that he used to kill his mother was extremely cruel, and he even cheated his relatives and friends out of money by pretending she was still alive."

It noted that Wu's actions had seriously violated the law and family ethics and had a strong negative impact on society.

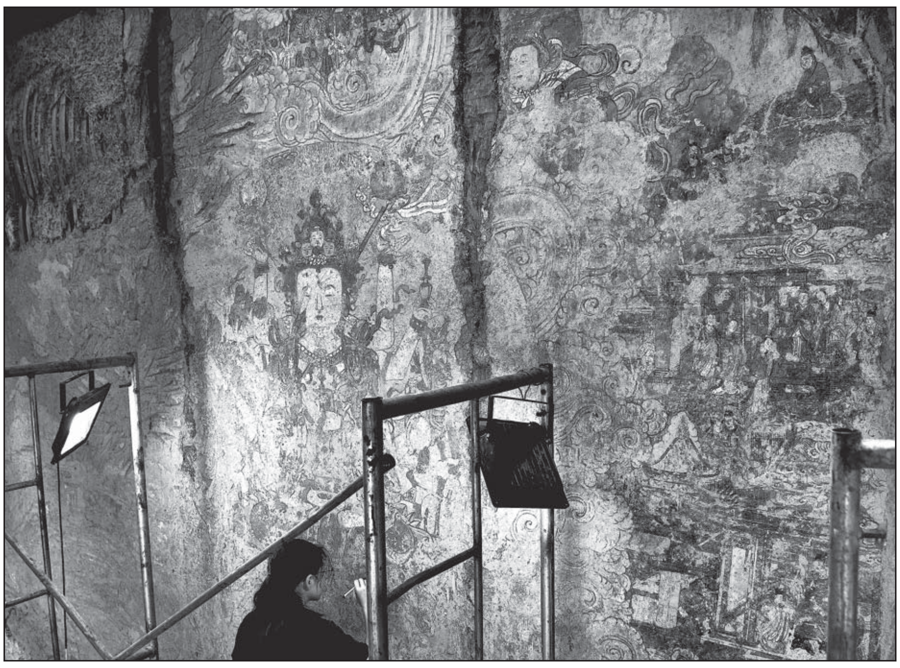
"He had the ability to know right from wrong and control himself while committing the crimes," the court said.

It upheld the original verdict, saying it was made based on sufficient evidence with the correct application of law and appropriate sentencing. The litigation process was also in line with the law, it concluded.

A video posted by China Central Television showed that Wu remained silent and stone-faced after hearing the court's ruling.

The death sentence will be submitted to the Supreme People's Court, China's top court, for review before the execution is carried out.

Ming mural makeover



A worker restores a mural at the Mingjiao Temple in Chengdu, Sichuan province, on Tuesday. The restoration of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) work was carried out in an orderly manner. It's the only Ming Dynasty double-layered mural discovered in Sichuan. ZHANG LANG / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

Growing number of shared e-bikes a cause for concern in Guangzhou

By **QIU QUANLIN** in Guangzhou
qiuquanlin@chinadaily.com.cn

Shared electric bicycle businesses will not be encouraged in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, as the number of such bikes far exceeds the capacity of existing traffic and parking resources, according to the local transportation authority.

In response to a proposal by two deputies to the local legislative body, the Guangzhou Transportation Bureau said recently that the huge number of electric bicycles has had a significant impact on normal traffic order and management.

By the end of March, the number of registered and licensed electric bicycles in Guangzhou reached 3.22 million, with the actual number estimated by local media to exceed 5 million, according to the local traffic police authority.

During the annual local legislative meeting early in January, two deputies said shared electric bicycles should be banned due to traffic chaos and a waste of public resources caused by their presence across the city.

Sales of electric bicycles have greatly increased in China thanks in part to heightened demand generated from delivery businesses such as those that deliver food and drinks.

According to the China Bicycle Association, a record 56.7 million electric bicycles were sold nationwide last year.

Some car owners have said that they have to drive very carefully as hordes of electric bicycles are present on streets and in residential public areas and parking spaces.

"Electric bicycles are seen in almost every space on public roads. Shared electric bicycles should not be encouraged as there are already too many," said Wu Junmeng, a car owner in Guangzhou.

According to a guideline issued by the Ministry of Transportation and other authorities in 2017, electric bicycle rental businesses will not be encouraged in the country.

Several large cities, including Beijing, Shanghai and Shenzhen in Guangdong, have explicitly prohibited or discouraged their development.

Transportation authorities and traffic police in Guangzhou have been cracking down on the illegal behavior of some enterprises that are operating unregistered and unlicensed shared electric bicycles.

Meanwhile, local housing and urban-rural development authorities said construction of public charging facilities for electric bicycles would be accelerated, aiming to provide safe charging environments for riders.

Future cloudy for 'senior friendly' vehicles

By **MA CHI** and **YAN MAOQIANG**

Unlicensed electric three-wheelers and four-wheelers known as *laotoule* have long been popular among the elderly in China.

Many seniors use *laotoule*, which literally means "joy for the elderly", for short-distance errands such as picking up their grandchildren from school and buying groceries.

They like using the low-speed vehicles because they are easy to drive and park. The vehicles are also not subject to traffic rules that are applied to motorized vehicles, or to receiving tickets for illegal parking.

Li Xiang, a Beijing native, bought a *laotoule* several years ago so his father could use it to pick up Li's child from school. The vehicle was bought for less than 30,000 yuan ($4,250), a price much lower than a normal electric car. It runs at a maximum speed of 45 kilometers per hour with a battery range of about 100 km.

"I also use it myself sometimes," said Li, adding that it is easy to park thanks to its compact size.

However, the use of *laotoule* has been controversial for a variety of reasons, including safety concerns.

"The manufacturers of these vehicles are often small, rural or township enterprises or even workshops, and there are no national standards for their production, so some of them are of poor quality," said Zhang Xiang, an automotive industry analyst.

Statistics from the Beijing Public Security Bureau show that in 2022, the city reported over 100 deaths caused by road accidents involving *laotoule*. From 2012 to 2016, nearly 20,000 people across the country died of accidents involving low-speed electric vehicles, according to data released by the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology.

In response to the growing concerns, some local governments have introduced measures to restrict the use of *laotoule*.

An electric three-wheeler is driven on a street in Beijing's Haidian district last month. NIU YUNGANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Starting next year, for example, Beijing will ban the use of illegal electric three-wheelers and four-wheelers on roads and in public spaces such as squares and parking lots.

The proposed ban has been warmly welcomed by residents who have long complained about the vehicles being randomly parked, occupying electric charging stations and other alleged misdeeds. However, some believe the government should not rush to implement the ban.

"Many think the low-speed electric vehicles are energy-saving, environmentally friendly and cater to the travel needs of the low-income population," said Dong Yang, vice-president of the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers.

Dong said creating regulations for such vehicles is a complex and challenging issue.

"It involves multiple departments, and there is a lack of consensus," he said.

Wang Junjin, a member of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, the country's top political advisory body, suggested promoting the use of low-cost electric cars as an alternative to *laotoule*.

However, the cost of buying the vehicles, which normally ranges from 7,000 to 40,000 yuan, is significantly lower than that of new energy vehicles, which may prevent some low-income residents from making the shift.

In addition, there are other advantages of using *laotoule* that make it hard for drivers to give them up.

"My father is too old, and it is not practical for him to take a driver's license test," said Li Xiang, from Beijing.

Wang said that with the future of these vehicles hanging in the balance, many hope that *laotoule* will continue to serve the elderly population under improved regulations.

Contact the writers at machi@chinadaily.com.cn

Policy seeks to improve students' science literacy

By **ZOU SHUO**
zoushuo@chinadaily.com.cn

China aims to greatly improve the science literacy of the nation's students in the next three to five years through efforts to reform science education in primary and secondary schools, according to a recent guideline.

New technologies such as artificial intelligence and virtual reality will be used to teach students how to perform experiments and bridge the gap in education resources in underdeveloped schools and regions, said the guideline, which was released by the Ministry of Education and 17 other departments.

Local authorities need to make sure that science courses at primary and secondary schools adhere to their syllabuses, and the time used to teach these courses should not be infringed upon by teachers of other subjects.

Meanwhile, each school needs to have a vice-principal in charge of science education and a science student counselor.

Schools are encouraged to invite experts and scientists to give lectures on campuses and organize student trips to scientific venues, the guideline said.

Moreover, science education should become a core subject in after-school services offered by schools, and activities such as science lectures and experiments should be carried out to increase students' interest.

Organizations and institutions such as universities, research institutes, science parks and museums are expected to better serve primary and middle school students.

Enterprises, especially those focusing on cutting-edge technology, are also encouraged to offer equipment, software and personnel to schools in underdeveloped regions and invite primary and middle school students to visit and learn how scientific knowledge is used in real life, the guideline added.

The document marks another step in China's efforts to build a country that is strong in education and science, as the report of the 20th Communist Party of China National Congress stressed the need to further integrate the development of education, science and talent.

Meanwhile, engineering and science majors have gained favor among Chinese university students, with AI topping the list of the most popular majors among new undergraduates.

Wei Yungang, director of the experimental education center at Beijing Normal University's School of Artificial Intelligence, said while first-tier cities offer better science education, resources are lacking at schools in smaller cities and rural areas.

Therefore, it was quite notable that the guideline stressed bridging the education gap with the use of AI, he said.

With the advent of the AI era, schools need to help students embrace the technology so they can develop the ability to solve problems with it, he said, adding that AI proficiency will be very important in future global competition.

The use of AI and digital education can help less-developed regions gain access to high-quality education materials, Wei said.

"The large amount of data and information gathered in daily classrooms can be analyzed by AI, so we can get a better understanding of how students learn, and how teachers and education authorities can use that knowledge in policymaking," he said.

Moreover, more efforts are needed to deeply integrate AI in classroom learning and teaching, which will bring major changes to how students are educated, he added.

CHINA

Housing subsidy rolled out to encourage births

District offers coupon worth 15 sq m, but parents, experts doubt it will be effective

By WANG XIAOYU
wangxiaoyu@chinadaily.com.cn

Financial incentives to encourage births have been kicked up a notch recently, with one affluent region in Zhejiang province saying that families with three children may be eligible for a one-time housing coupon worth 300,000 yuan ($43,100).

Shangyu district in Shaoxing city said last month that families with three children who do not own a home or who currently live in a space of less than 30 square meters per head will be eligible for the coupon, which can be used to directly deduct from the purchase.

The average price of homes in Shangyu is around 20,000 yuan per sq m, which means that families eligible for a coupon will be compensated for around 15 sq m of their new home, according to TheHour.cn, a local media organization.

Shangyu announced the policy as part of a package of measures to reduce the cost of raising children and encourage a fertility-friendly society. The local government said that it will dedicate 100 million yuan annually to the plan.

Other policy highlights include discounts and prioritizing the allocation of affordable housing for families with two to three children. Families will also be able to obtain subsidies for rented housing.

Since China announced the decision to allow couples to have up to three children and released a slew of policies to encourage births in May 2021, local governments have rolled out incentives centering on monthly allowances, extending paternity and maternity leaves, and building more nursery care facilities.

Similar policies to reduce the cost of buying a new house for families with children have also been implemented in cities in the provinces of Heilongjiang, Shandong and Jiangsu.

Earlier in February, Weihai, a coastal city in Shandong, announced that families with two or more children will be given a maximum of 50,000 yuan when they purchase a new home.

While hailing the launch of a variety of financial incentives, experts and parents have doubts the measures will influence young couples.

Ma Li, who is expecting her first baby in December, said that a subsidy of 300,000 yuan still pales in comparison to the hefty cost of buying an apartment in more developed regions such as Zhejiang and Jiangsu province, where she lives.

She added that there are other ways of claiming housing subsidies.

"Some companies offer employees housing subsidies, and some local governments also offer them to attract skilled individuals," she said. "But having another baby is simply too costly."

So far, Ma said that she is against having a second child, let alone a third one.

"The harm that another pregnancy would do to my body, the financial burden of buying a larger apartment and intense academic competition are among the reasons for my decision," she said. "After all, the costs of having and raising a child cannot be measured with a single number."

He Dan, director of the China Population and Development Center, said during an interview with ifeng.com that the prime age for having children in China used to be around 20 but is now around 25.

"It is important to accept the choices of young people while offering guidance on encouraging marriage and births," she said. "Their choices are a reflection of policies and the external pressures they face. What we need to do is to influence their environments and enable them to make their own decisions."

She added that fertility support policies should not be one-time measures.

"I think we should create a legal framework and set up regulations to enforce the measures."

Visitors experience virtual reality video gaming at the China Science Fiction Convention 2023 in Beijing on Tuesday. ZHANG WEI / CHINA DAILY

Convention promotes nation's sci-fi progress

By DU JUAN
dujuan@chinadaily.com.cn

The China Science Fiction Convention 2023 kicked off with a grand opening ceremony in Beijing's Shougang Park on Monday night, serving as a significant part of this year's Zhongguancun Forum, the national-level international science and technology summit.

"Science fiction is increasingly garnering public attention and drawing active participation from science and technology professionals with its unique allure," said Shu Wei, vice-president and executive secretary of the secretariat of the China Association for Science and Technology.

He highlighted the strength and rapid progress of China's scientific and technological achievements.

According to an industrial report unveiled at the ceremony, the country's revenue in the sci-fi sector reached 87.7 billion yuan ($12.3 billion) in 2022. The sci-fi literature sector generated 3.04 billion yuan, up 12.6 percent year-on-year, while the sci-fi film and television industry raked in 8.35 billion yuan, a year-on-year increase of 16.1 percent.

"Sci-fi is a unique and effective form of science popularization that is increasingly playing a prominent role in enhancing scientific literacy among the public," he added.

A cyberpunk-style hologram 3D show, metaverse displays and sci-fi video clips projected onto towering screens on Shougang Park's iconic blast furnaces were seen during the opening ceremony at the park, which has been transformed from an old steel plant into a hub for China's sci-fi and high-tech sectors in western Beijing's Shijingshan district.

At the ceremony, the Beijing government granted business nameplates to the Beijing Yuanyu Science Fiction and Future Technology Research Institute, as well as to the studios of Chinese sci-fi luminaries Liu Cixin and Wang Jinkang.

87.7 billion yuan
China's revenue in the science-fiction sector last year

"Science fiction is a fantastic realm centered on science and the future," said Francesco Verso, an Italian sci-fi writer, at the event. "It can stimulate imagination and creative thinking and arouse young people's interest in science. It is also an indispensable bridge to connect global scientific discourse and jointly open up our imaginations."

He said China is a country full of wisdom and imagination, as well as innovation and creation. With joint efforts from the government and private industries, science fiction has become increasingly popular in the country.

Verso is not only a sci-fi writer, but also an enthusiast who has been making efforts to promote international communication in the sector. He purchased the Italian version of Liu Cixin's writings that he will bring back to Italy as he strives to make more Chinese sci-fi books available to European readers.

"I believe that with the help of the China Science Fiction Convention, Chinese science fiction will continue to see new achievements and make outstanding contributions to the development of global science fiction," he said.

During the weeklong event, organizers will showcase a diverse selection of sci-fi movies, including an online exhibition of 30 Chinese and foreign films. Other activities, including themed forums, a sci-fi carnival and high-tech and sci-fi exhibitions, will also be held during the week.

Wuxi offering incentives to lure new graduates

By CANG WEI in Nanjing
cangwei@chinadaily.com.cn

Wuxi, which held a collective graduation ceremony for more than 50,000 of its college graduates on Friday in Jiangsu province, has expanded recruitment and offered preferential policies in a bid to attract more "partners of the city".

Du Xiaogang, secretary of the Wuxi Committee of the Communist Party of China, said at the ceremony that the graduates were more than welcome to work in Wuxi.

"It is never the watches, the necklaces, the text messages or the photos that are the most precious souvenirs," Du said. "It is the marks that the city has engraved on you and me, like what rivers have engraved on mountains, that is the most precious."

The local government, local companies — both private and State-owned — and government-affiliated institutions will expand recruitment by providing more than 20,000 jobs for the graduates.

According to Du, Wuxi will also hold more events, cultural performances and food festivals, such as the FIBA 3×3 World Tour Masters and Midi Music Festival, to impress young people living in the city.

"What you like is what we will do," he said.

To boost communication between the graduates and the recruitment companies and institutions, the local government also held a 24-hour livestreaming event last week, which attracted 18 well-known companies and 220,000 viewers.

Chen Liang, president of Wuxi Talent Group, said that more training opportunities will be provided to college students so that they can better adapt to workplaces, as more than 5,000 young engineers who are third-year undergraduates and second-year graduate students will be trained in the next five years.

> "It is the marks that the city has engraved on you and me, like what rivers have engraved on mountains, that is the most precious."
>
> **Du Xiaogang,** Party chief of Wuxi, Jiangsu province

For college students who choose to work in Wuxi, they can receive a two-year rental subsidy of up to 20,000 yuan ($2,800).

Also, those who start a business in Wuxi can apply for a one-time startup subsidy of 6,000 yuan and a startup rent subsidy of up to 10,000 yuan per year for three years. Some may even qualify for a subsidy of up to 300,000 yuan from the government.

In addition, students can visit public tourist sites for free until June 2024. They can also visit some sports venues for free and can receive public transportation discounts. Even if they choose not to stay in Wuxi, they can visit those attractions for free in June.

College graduates who come to Wuxi to find jobs from other cities can also take advantage of free accommodation provided by the government for seven to 90 days.

According to the Ministry of Education, China will see a record 11.58 million college graduates this year, an increase of 820,000 year-on-year.

The Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security said the country aims to add 12 million jobs in cities this year while keeping its unemployment rate at around 5.5 percent.

Stuck stork rescued

Electricians rescue a young oriental stork that was stuck between the gaps of a 50-meter-high electricity tower in Rugao, Jiangsu province, on Monday. The local electricity company sent two engineers to rescue the birdling, which was then examined by animal workers and placed back in its nest. They also sealed the gaps to prevent future incidents. JIANG JIANHUA / FOR CHINA DAILY

Briefly

Former vice-governor gets 12 years for bribes

Hao Chunrong, a former vice-governor of Liaoning province, was sentenced on Tuesday to 12 years in prison for taking bribes worth 18.8 million yuan ($2.66 million). The verdict was announced by the Dalian Intermediate People's Court in Liaoning. Hao was also fined 2 million yuan. Money and property that she received illegally will be turned over to the State treasury. The court determined that Hao took advantage of her official positions between 1999 and 2021, and provided companies and individuals with undue assistance in job promotions, land allocation, and project contracts and approvals. She illegally accepted property worth more than 18.8 million yuan.

Drilling of deep borehole begins in Xinjiang

The drilling of China's first borehole over 10,000 meters deep for scientific exploration began on Tuesday in the Tarim Basin, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region. The operation started at 11:46 am on Tuesday. It represents a milestone in Chinese exploration, providing an unprecedented opportunity to study areas of the planet deep beneath the surface. With a design depth of 11,100 meters, the borehole is located in the hinterland of the Taklimakan Desert. During the drilling process, the equipment, including drill bits and drill pipes weighing more than 2,000 metric tons, will penetrate more than 10 continental strata.

XINHUA—CHINA DAILY

Forest sinks have critical role in carbon reduction

By LI HONGYANG
lihongyang@chinadaily.com.cn

Top scientists have emphasized the importance of forest carbon sinks as having an irreplaceable role in reducing carbon in the atmosphere and ultimately combating climate change.

Yin Weilun, an academician of the Chinese Academy of Engineering and former principal of Beijing Forestry University, said that forests and grasslands hold a unique position in combating global climate change.

Forest carbon sinks are plants that absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and fix it in vegetation or soil, thereby reducing concentration of the gas, Yin said.

Speaking on Tuesday at the Forestry and Grassland Carbon Sink Innovation International Forum, which is running parallel to the Zhongguancun Forum held in Beijing from Thursday to Tuesday, the scientist said that good forest management can increase carbon absorption capability.

Yin called for more research in forest management to ensure the sustainability of forests and their carbon sink capacity.

"The growth and development cycle of each tree species is different. For example, poplars reach their peak height in about 20 years. After that, they are unlikely to grow and the tree top will rot away."

To use land efficiently, forest managers must cut down some rotten trees and replace them with young ones so that the forest system can maintain its ability to reproduce and act as a carbon sink, he said.

Yin also stressed the need for increasing forest reserves, grasslands and wetlands to enhance their ability to absorb carbon.

At the forum, Du Xiangwan, former deputy head of the Chinese Academy of Engineering, said forests and grasslands can make multiple contributions to climate change mitigation as each cubic meter of wood growth can absorb an average of 1.83 metric tons of carbon dioxide, he said.

In addition, afforestation, grassland and wetland restoration, and desertification control not only protect biodiversity but also provide solutions for climate change adaptation and mitigation, he added.

Last year, the National Forestry and Grassland Administration set up a carbon sink research institute to study the country's potential for carbon sinks through forests and grasslands.

This research work will assess the spatial distribution of carbon sinks with the aim of understanding how to increase them, the administration said.

Measures to help heat up foreign trade

Document calls for resuming live exhibitions to boost export growth

By ZHANG YUE
zhangyue@chinadaily.com.cn

A recently-issued guideline containing a raft of detailed and concrete policy incentives aimed at maintaining China's foreign trade and optimizing trade structure comes at a critical time, as it should instill much-needed confidence in foreign companies looking to do business in China and make foreign trade development healthier and more sustainable, experts and company leaders said.

On April 25, the General Office of the State Council, China's Cabinet, published a guideline containing 18 specific policy measures, including the orderly resumption of live trade exhibitions in China, facilitating visas for overseas business people and continued support for automobile exports. It also urged lower-level governments and commerce chambers to intensify efforts to encourage domestic foreign trade companies to participate in overseas exhibitions and to organize their own events abroad.

The measures are seen as "much needed" by many foreign trade company owners in China. As much of the world ground to a halt as a result of the pandemic during the past three years, pent-up demand for trade exhibitions and international travel grew. Though numerous online exhibitions were held during the period, business owners still feel live exhibitions are the best way to attract clients, showcase their products and broaden their own perspectives.

"Professional industrial exhibitions serve as an essential connection between the supply and demand sides in industrial and supply chains," said Chen Dexing, president of Wenzhou Kanger Crystallite Utensils Co Ltd, a Zhejiang province-based glass and ceramic ware manufacturer that employs more than 1,500 people.

"Most foreign customers prefer to see, touch and feel products before placing orders. Participating in trade shows will certainly help us get a clear picture of what consumers want and gain some insights in terms of product design and function," he said. "After all, not every export deal can be sealed via cross-border e-commerce channels."

Addressing problems

From a macroeconomic perspective, the momentum of growth in foreign trade at the start of this year was critical yet stagnant, as analysts and economists worried about the lack of orders generated by sluggish global growth.

The central government has repeatedly noted that foreign trade has diminished and has become more complicated. Experts said that some of the specific steps in the new policy document will not only help underpin this year's trade growth, but will also be conducive to improving China's foreign trade structure in the long run.

"For decades, foreign trade development has been one of the major driving forces behind China's growth. This year, with China's foreign trade growth currently evolving, the new guideline has addressed some of the most urgent, pressing issues to help foreign trade companies participating in and placing orders at trade exhibitions, to facilitate the exchange of cross-border business personnel," said Ma Hong, a professor of economics at the School of Economics and Management at Tsinghua University in Beijing, whose research interest focuses on trade and tariffs.

The new document also proposed several measures that could spark innovation in foreign trade development. These include facilitating trade digitization, cross-border e-commerce, green trade and border trade, and the gradual transfer of processing to less developed central and western regions of the country.

Efforts will also be made to stabilize and expand the import and export volume of key products, including automobiles.

The guideline urged local governments and business associations to set up direct interaction with automobile and shipping companies, and encourage them to sign medium- to long-term agreements. Banks and their overseas institutions are also encouraged to create financial products and services to support automobile overseas' branches.

The guideline also highlighted efforts to expand imports of advanced technological equipment.

"These will contribute to stabilizing China's trade growth momentum and to achieving optimization of its export structure in the medium- to long-term," Ma said.

Improving structure key

The latest trade figures from the General Administration of Customs show that exports grew by 8.5 percent year-on-year in April — surprisingly strong despite weakening global demand. Export volume grew to $295.4 billion, though at a slower pace compared with that of March.

Ma remains optimistic and noted that more efforts should be focused on improving China's trade structure, a point that is also underscored in the document.

"Despite the strong year-on-year growth delivered in April, growth in foreign trade has been moderate since 2021," he said. "The April growth rate was mainly underpinned by positive short-term factors such as the low base effect over the same period last year, the release of pent-up orders and the lagging impact of inflation in advanced economies. Yet these factors are only temporary and their effect will be difficult to sustain."

He said that currently, there are several major issues with China's trade structure that need to be addressed.

First, trade growth in goods and services has been uneven, with the latter being weaker. Specifically, China still lacks an advantage in digital and artificial intelligence products that come with high value-added services, he said.

Second, domestic traders aren't fully capitalizing on the export advantages of high-end equipment and high-tech products, and the urgency of boosting brand building for these two kinds of goods remains acute.

Most importantly, Ma warned that China's participation in the global value chain is mainly concentrated in mid-processing and manufacturing. This minimizes the proportion of added value and makes Chinese products more prone to substitution by goods made in other countries.

The April guideline noted that exporting innovative products will help improve the quality and value of China's exports. Experts specifically cited new energy vehicles as an example.

In the first three months of this year, China exported 1.07 million vehicles, a 58.3 percent increase on the same period last year, while the value of shipments increased 96.6 percent to 147.5 billion yuan ($21.5 billion), according to data freshly released by the General Administration of Customs.

Zhou Mi, a senior researcher at the Beijing-based Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation, said that going forward, facilitating the exports of NEVs further will require greater communication between NEV enterprises and local governments.

"For example, the government should make policy adjustments in light of specific conditions in localities, make more effort to improve the efficacy of border logistics, and facilitate the exports of NEV components," he said.

Zhong Nan contributed to this story.

> These will contribute to stabilizing China's trade growth momentum and to achieving optimization of its export structure in the medium- to long-term."
>
> **Ma Hong,** a professor of economics at the School of Economics and Management at Tsinghua University

SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

Policy Digest

Agencies to help SMEs market sci-tech products

The Ministry of Industry and Information Technology and nine other central departments have unveiled a plan to improve the ability of small- and medium-sized companies to market their technological achievements over the next two years, according to a document issued on Thursday.

Noting that SMEs play an important role in promoting innovation, creating jobs and improving lives, the document said that efforts will be made to strengthen the core competitiveness of SMEs so that they can become more specialized and sophisticated, and capable of producing innovative products.

To this end, efforts are needed to accelerate the accumulation of their sci-tech achievements and facilitate the integration of industry, academia and research.

The document said that a repository of sci-tech achievements will be created to enable SMEs to access scientific resources from laboratories and research and development centers to help them develop their own technological products.

It also encouraged large companies to share their equipment and laboratories with SMEs.

Expansion of marriage, divorce registries

Authorized by the State Council, China's Cabinet, 21 provincial-level regions, including Beijing and Tianjin, will implement a cross-regional marriage and divorce registration policy on a trial basis.

The pilot policy will come into force on June 1, according to a news conference by the Ministry of Civil Affairs last Thursday.

Under the new policy, mainland residents who plan to get married can choose registries in the places of habitual residence of either the bride or groom, instead of having to return to the cities where they hold household registration, or *hukou*.

Seven of the 21 provincial-level regions have been allowing cross-regional marriage registration since June 2021, and five have also permitted cross-regional registration for divorce.

More than 125,000 couples have benefited from the program, according to the ministry.

With an increasing number of people not living or working in the places where they hold *hukou*, the expanded program now covers about 78.5 percent of the population, said Wang Jinhua, an official with the ministry.

Marriage registries handle marriage and divorce registration, and reissue marriage certificates for about 18 million couples on average annually, the ministry said.

Rural students can earn free medical degree

More than 6,150 students will be enrolled in a tuition-free bachelor's degree program in medicine as part of the country's efforts to address its shortage of doctors in rural areas, the Ministry of Education said in a notice on May 24.

After earning their bachelor's in majors including clinical medicine, traditional Mongolian medicine and traditional Uyghur medicine, the graduates can work as doctors in rural medical institutions in China's less-developed central and western regions.

According to the ministry, the program is only open to students from rural areas, and the candidates also need to take the national college entrance exam, or *gaokao*.

CHINA DAILY-XINHUA

Business in border regions seen as critical to economic development

By ZHANG YUE

The newly-issued guideline by the General Office of the State Council on stabilizing trade growth has also touched on the importance of trade development in China's border regions, which experts said could lead to faster innovation that could help stabilize overall trade growth at a time of global uncertainty.

Specifically, the new guideline urges greater efforts in expanding foreign trade in border provinces. Pilot programs for import commodity processing in border regions will be promoted, and new measures will be put in place to explore the establishment of a data monitoring platform for goods in these areas.

In addition, regulations for trade deals among border regions will be introduced or revised, the guideline said.

During a fact-finding trip to the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region and Yunnan province in late April, Chinese Premier Li Qiang called for stronger steps to be taken to bolster the growth of China's border regions to enable the people there to prosper.

Zhou Mi, a senior researcher at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation in Beijing, noted that border trade has long been a crucial sector in China's overall trade scheme. It's also a fulcrum for economic development in border provinces.

"Development of border trade also has positive and significant implications for the effectiveness of the Belt and Road Initiative. It will help strengthen trust between China and neighboring countries," he said. "This year, with the optimization of epidemic prevention and control policies, the room for border-trade growth will be significant."

He added that to boost border trade, policies need to be customized to suit different border regions.

Tu Xinquan, dean of the China Institute for World Trade Organization Studies at the University of International Business and Economics in Beijing, said that trade is an important and effective way to build and strengthen relationships with neighboring countries.

"For China's relationships with countries in Southeast Asia such as Vietnam, for example, border trade has long made critical contributions to stabilizing overall ties," Tu noted.

He added that this year, as global dynamics shift, growth and market confidence are key to maintaining border trade volume.

Tu said that he holds an optimistic overall view of trade growth this year.

"Foreign trade growth will likely remain positive, and will be a positive factor in catalyzing overall national growth this year," he said.

CHINA

From forlorn to fortune, poor land yields fish gold

Once held back by low-quality fields, village finds success by breeding loach

By ZHAO RUIXUE in Jinan
zhaoruixue@chinadaily.com.cn

Once, the low-lying land around Wangshiying in Ningjin county, Shandong province, held back the village's development because of its low agricultural yields, but now that it is being used to raise fish — in this case loaches — it has helped the village emerge from poverty.

"Don't underestimate these loach fry, they have made us wealthy," Chen Xuyong, the village's Party secretary, said as he scooped a bowl of water out of a breeding pond.

Inside the ponds, thousands of tiny loaches, smaller than ants, were swarming. In the bigger ponds in front of the breeding ponds, loach released a week earlier had already grown to the size of tadpoles.

Loach flesh is rich in protein and has a low-fat content, and eating it helps reduce blood lipids and blood pressure. It is not only delicious but also has a medicinal effect, Chen said, explaining why the fish sells so well.

Last month, the village cooperative signed a contract with businessmen from South Korea to build a loach processing plant to produce products for overseas markets.

The plant is scheduled to be completed by the end of the year and will have an annual output of up to 5,000 metric tons of loach products, Chen said.

"The processing plant is expected to provide around 50 jobs and double our village's collective income," he added.

The 54-year-old has been Party secretary of the village, which is home to fewer than 300 residents, for the last 31 years.

During that time, he has been looking for a way to help residents make money. He tried raising cattle and cows, but neither worked well.

"Our village is on low-lying terrain, which means we only harvest crops once a year. Most of the young people have left to work in the city, leaving the elderly and children behind," Chen said.

To change that situation, he traveled to villages in places such as Lianyungang in Jiangsu province and Tianjin to find an alternative that would be suitable for Wangshiying.

He came across the right solution in 2016 when he decided to turn to loach farming.

But the fish were unable to adapt to the village's water and environment, and their first year was a failure. Chen invited experts to study the soil and water.

"We started over. I monitored the water quality many times a day to collect data and finally mastered the breeding techniques," he said.

Chen and the villagers transformed a former brick factory into an experimental loach farm in 2017. A year later, they expanded.

Last year, the village collectively earned 520,000 yuan ($73,744) from loach farming, proof that aquaculture can work well in low-lying villages, he said.

Now an expert in loach farming, he has developed an automated feeding system that saves on feed and labor and reduces water pollution.

He has also set up a training school in the village and invited experts to give free lectures, and he has visited 50 neighboring villages to show farmers how to use idle ponds to farm loaches.

Currently, 16 of the 50 villages in the area are farming the fish.

Chen Haitao, who lives in Wangshiying, said he earns a salary of about 5,000 yuan from working at the loach farms.

Two years ago, everyone in the village moved into two-story villas, and their new residential community also has parks, squares and a service center.

Chen Xuyong takes care of loaches in a breeding pond on his loach farm in Ningjin county, Shandong province. PROMOTED TO CHINA DAILY

520,000 yuan

the sum Wangshiying village collectively earned from loach farming last year

Comic opera reels in crowds in Guangzhou

GUANGZHOU — A theater bar in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, was packed with opera lovers during a recent staging of a comedy about two men fighting over a woman.

Rita, a comic opera in one act composed by 19th century Italian composer Gaetano Donizetti, tells the story of a bar owner named Rita who mistakenly believes that her first husband, Gasparo, has died in an accident and decides to embrace a new life with her second husband, Beppe. When Gasparo returns out of the blue, he enters into a battle with Beppe over his wife, resulting in a spectacular farce.

The version presented in Guangzhou was specially adapted for the city by director Peter Gordon and his partner, Italian composer Marco Iannelli.

Gordon began working in Hong Kong in 1985 and has become increasingly involved in cultural projects related to literature, theater and opera since 2000.

"Opera in Hong Kong has traditionally focused on 'grand opera' — large and quite expensive productions. These are very nice, but the number of productions that can be put on each year is quite limited," Gordon said.

"I felt that it should be possible to produce smaller operas in a cost-effective way, allowing for an entirely new set of productions, while not sacrificing the quality of singing or music."

To that end, he began producing operas on a chamber-music scale a few years ago with Iannelli, an award-winning composer who also lives in Hong Kong. *Rita* is one of their joint projects.

In 2022, with the introduction of Hong Kong tenor Chen Yong, Gordon and Iannelli produced a new version of *Rita* for a Guangzhou audience and recruited talent from the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area to perform and produce the opera.

"Guangzhou is of course a bit different from Hong Kong, and the Guangzhou Opera House wanted to localize the story within the opera house itself, to set it in its own bar — which we thought a very good idea," Gordon said. "In addition, they wanted to expand on an idea we had used in an earlier Hong Kong production of integrating the audience into the performance. What we also wanted to do was to integrate the orchestra into the performance in this staging, as if they were actually playing in the bar."

The Guangzhou cast is composed of college students, whose voices are young and fresh. Xing Xinyuan, who plays Rita, is a sophomore at the Xinghai Conservatory of Music's Vocal and Opera Department. She is the youngest actor in the show, and Rita is her first lead role in a staged performance.

The Italian dialogue, coordinating with the band, interacting closely with the audience, and the novel form of performance all posed her challenges. "We rehearsed the play for less than six months before staging it, which is unprecedentedly fast, and I've learned a lot."

Less than a year after its debut last July, the 70-minute opera is a hit, with tickets selling out as soon as they are released. Opera is generally regarded as an art form with a relatively high appreciation threshold, but *Rita* has brought more young people into the theater.

"We were all very happy to see so many young people in the audience — and having a good time, too," Gordon said.

Gordon has full confidence in the Chinese market. "What I do know is that China has both an increasing number of modern theaters, as well as ever-increasing numbers of good, young opera singers," he said.

XINHUA

Changsha: Highland for construction machinery on the rise

By YUAN SHENGGAO

The third Changsha International Construction Equipment Exhibition was held at the Changsha International Convention and Exhibition Center in Central China's Hunan province from May 12 to 15.

With the theme of "New Generation of High-end, Intelligent and New Energy Construction Machinery", the four-day exhibition strived to build an innovative and open platform for exchanges.

The event attracted more than 1,500 construction machinery enterprises from China and abroad, 35 of which were the world's top 50 construction machinery companies. The cumulative number of visitors exceeded 350,000, with a total transaction volume of 53.6 billion yuan ($7.58 billion).

Nearly 100 companies from Changsha, known as the "capital of construction machinery", participated in the exhibition, including global construction machinery giants such as Sany Group, China Railway Construction Heavy Industry Corp and Sunward Intelligent Equipment, and small and medium-sized enterprises that have technological advantages in subsectors.

As a leading enterprise in the industry, Sany brought nearly 80 new products to the site. With an exhibition area of more than 10,000 square meters, the company was the largest exhibitor at the event. The new products it displayed fully demonstrated the company's recent research and development achievements.

"Against the backdrop of the country's dual carbon goals, electrification is an inevitable trend in the construction machinery industry. Sany exhibited more than 20 electrified products at this exhibition, and fully displayed its latest technologies in fields such as batteries, motors, electrical controls, and hydrogen fuel," said Zhao Hui, a Sany executive.

Known as a "little giant" enterprise in the tunnel and mining subsector, Hunan Wuxin Tunnel Intelligent Equipment brought multiple products to the exhibition, including the world's first curved arm rock drilling car that attracted many customers.

CRCC Heavy Industry brought its entire portfolio of tunnel construction equipment to the exhibition site. Its fully computerized three-arm rock drilling trolley is particularly powerful, with three long arms rising into the air, and it features precise control technology, three-dimensional scanning and contour reconstruction technology, among other things. Not only did the complete machine companies exhibit many star products, but the parts companies also demonstrated their core technological achievements.

"Our aluminum alloy walking board is much lighter in weight than traditional iron walking boards and can reduce emissions, in line with the green transition," said Cao Zehua, deputy general manager of Xingsha Machine Tool Equipment Co.

As a high-tech enterprise in Hunan, Xingsha focuses on the production of engineering machinery parts and is a supplier of leading enterprises in the industry such as Sany and Zoomlion Heavy Industry. The company brought its main products such as structural parts and machined parts to the exhibition.

In the zone of innovative achievements in natural disaster prevention and control technology and equipment, Changsha-based Wasom Emergency Equipment showcased its latest product, a high-flow portable emergency rescue submersible electric pump. "Our product is ultra-lightweight, weighing only 28 kilograms, yet the hourly drainage capacity can reach 600 cubic meters," said Liu Bojun, an executive of the company.

Seentone, which specializes in the manufacturing of special vehicles for emergency rescue, brought four new products. Among them, a breakdown truck is designed for new energy vehicles. When a new energy vehicle runs out of battery power, the vehicle can provide emergency charging rescue services. At the exhibition, many people expressed great interest in this newly developed product.

In recent years, Changsha has been building itself into a global high-end equipment manufacturing base.

In March, CRCC Heavy Industry won the China Industry Award with its outstanding performance in independent innovation, transformation and upgrading, safety control and digitalization. Heavy equipment developed independently by CRCC Heavy Industry, such as the first domestically-manufactured open-type rock tunnel boring machine, the first 16-meter ultra-large-diameter shield machine, the world's deepest underwater tunnel shield machine, and the world's largest diameter vertical wellbore drilling machine, has led China's underground engineering equipment to make great strides in development.

CRCC Heavy Industry continues to expand the overseas influence of its brands with a marketing network covering 184 countries and regions around the world. Last year, its overseas revenue increased by 512.04 percent year-on-year. The company's rail transit equipment has broken into the Ugandan and Egyptian markets. And CRCC Heavy Industry's tunneling machine products have shown outstanding performance in the Chile, India and Sri Lanka markets. Its special equipment products have also been exported to the Serbian and Saudi Arabian markets in large quantities.

The Changsha area of the China (Hunan) Pilot Free Trade Zone provides fertile ground for Changsha's construction machinery companies to explore international markets. As a core area of the FTZ, Changsha has formed an industry cluster for construction machinery and accelerated the pace for Chinese companies in the industry to go abroad by exploring a path for exporting secondhand Chinese construction machinery via the FTZ.

On March 10, 216 pieces of used construction machinery from Sunward were exported to dozens of countries and regions. The exported machinery covered 12 categories such as rotary drilling rigs, excavators and pump trucks, with a total value of 317 million yuan.

Nowadays, Changsha's construction machinery industry cluster has become the main force in creating a highland for the nation's advanced manufacturing. In the future, it will focus on such fields as technological innovation, product R&D, complete machine and parts manufacturing, and intelligent services and help construction machinery companies build a number of high-end equipment manufacturing and operation centers as well as service and maintenance centers to expand their markets overseas.

Clockwise from top: The third Changsha International Construction Equipment Exhibition attracts visitors from China and abroad. Vehicles are displayed during the event. Fu Xuming (thrid left), Party secretary of Changsha county, Hunan province, visits Sunward. ZENG SHIYI / FOR CHINA DAILY Sany is a key construction machinery giant. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

ADVERTORIAL

COMMENT

Editorials

Tokyo and Seoul should reflect on how costly it is to go all in with Washington on decoupling

In East Asia, the economies of the Chinese mainland, Japan, the Republic of Korea and China's Taiwan island have established an increasingly mature pattern of division in the global semiconductor supply chain.

The Washington-led Western initiative to reshuffle that supply chain, however, is threatening to turn all that upside down. Having imposed its own restrictions last year aimed at stifling China's tech progress, Washington is pressuring the three regional economies to do the same.

In his talks with Japanese Trade Minister Yasutoshi Nishimura and ROK Trade Minister Ann Dukgeun on the sidelines of the APEC trade ministers' meeting, Commerce Minister Wang Wentao again highlighted the lose-lose nature of the semiconductor export restrictions Washington is pressing Tokyo and Seoul to impose against China and how they will harm regional and global trade.

Condemning the latest G7 summit in Hiroshima for "smearing and attacking" Beijing, Wang called for a halt to the US-led semiconductor export controls, "which seriously violate international economic and trade rules and damage the foundation of industrial development".

Under the pressure applied by the US, the Japanese government has announced restrictions on the exports of 23 types of advanced chipmaking technology, which are expected to take effect on July 23. The ROK government has also pledged to satisfy Washington's request that it introduce similar controls.

If both Tokyo and Seoul follow through on their promises made before and in Hiroshima, fundamental changes will take place in East Asia's economic and trade landscape, inflicting unaffordable losses on the three economies.

According to ROK trade ministry data, about 40 percent of its chip exports go to the Chinese mainland. And Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said the Chinese mainland has been the largest export market for Japanese semiconductor suppliers, with an over-$10 billion annual volume, accounting for one-fourth of all Japanese semiconductor exports.

Criticizing the Japanese trade restrictions as ambiguously worded and overly expansive, the China Semiconductor Industry Association argued in an appeal letter to the Japanese government that the restrictions are a formula for mutual harm. Chinese and Japanese semiconductor industries have been mutually dependent and cooperating very well. Forcefully disrupting the industry links that have emerged in the free market will hurt both countries dearly, it argued.

The US' attempts to reshape the regional semiconductor supply chain to exclude the Chinese mainland are a part of its broader decoupling campaign, which it now euphemistically calls de-risking, in a bid to disguise the nature of its actions under the cover of the European Union's strategy.

What Washington is doing is weaponizing the supply chain to attack the Chinese mainland's semiconductor sector. Tokyo and Seoul should reflect on the wisdom of being a party to that scheme.

Launch signals wider-opening space sector

Traditionally, China's astronauts are selected from among fighter plane pilots with ample flying experience, as they can control the machinery and have the training to stay calm should an emergency arise in space.

Yet among the three astronauts aboard Shenzhou XVI, which is taking them to Tiangong, China's space station, is Gui Haichao, a professor from Beihang University. He is the first civilian China has sent into space, and will conduct space science experiments, collect and analyze data and maintain the lab devices on the space station.

That's good news for the nation's space science, as he will be more professional in carrying out research experiments on the space station.

It is also good news for China's astronautics sector, as it shows that the nation is confident enough to send persons other than military pilots into space. It means that the threshold for traveling into space is being lowered, offering hope to many that one day ordinary people will be able to buy a ticket for a trip into space.

Besides Gui, there is also Zhu Yangzhu, a space flight engineer from China's astronaut team, who will serve as a professional rather than a pilot. Zhu's teaching experience in college, similar to that of Gui, is also evidence of Chinese astronauts' educational background being raised.

Twenty years after Shenzhou V took China's first astronaut Yang Liwei out of the Earth's atmosphere, China already has a full team of astronauts ready to further our understanding of the cosmos.

Mission commander Jing Haipeng is on his fourth trip into space, making him the Chinese astronaut with the richest experience in space travel. In the 15 years between his first mission and this one, China has progressed from sending astronauts into space to supporting their stay for half a year on its newly constructed space station.

The country has already started preparing for a mission to land Chinese astronauts on the moon before 2030.

China's Tiangong space station will be the only one in service after the planned retirement of the International Space Station. With China's space program including the training of astronauts from other countries, no one should be surprised if a multinational crew is sent to Tiangong some day.

Likewise China has said that its plan to construct and operate a lunar research station is open to the participation of all nations, international organizations and international partners.

US seeks to smear China's peace brokering

While China's special representative for Eurasian affairs Li Hui was shuttling from Ukraine to Poland, France, Germany and Russia to thread the needle for a peaceful resolution to the Ukraine crisis, some media outlets in the United States kept pouring dirty water on his efforts in a bid to smear China's pro-peace efforts by claiming he was doing Moscow's bidding.

The propaganda was typified by a Wall Street Journal report on Friday, which claimed to be based on the comments of "Western officials familiar with talks in capitals across the continent".

According to the report, Li was urging the countries to "leave Russia in possession of the parts of its smaller neighbor that it now occupies".

Yet Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba posted a video on social media the same day, saying that he immediately contacted the diplomats of the European countries Li had visited to verify that message after seeing the report. None of them could confirm the report.

Kuleba said the diplomats told him that the issue of recognition of Russian possession of occupied territories of Ukraine was not discussed in their meetings with the Chinese envoy.

The top Ukrainian diplomat has urged all parties to remain calm, think with common sense and not react emotionally based on one article. He said that Ukraine maintains a relationship of trust with all its key partners, including China, and stressed that Kyiv will continue to maintain communication and dialogue with Beijing.

Despite this, it is predictable that those US media organizations that have no price to pay for publishing such fake news will continue to fabricate such reports based on anonymous sources "familiar with the matter".

China's neutrality on the issue has been questioned from day one by the US and some of its key allies. Yet there is no more neutral party than China on the issue.

It is the US-led club that defines those supporting the Ukrainian side and opposing the Russians as "neutral", and led by Washington the members are pushing the proposition that only these "neutral" parties are suitable to act as fair peace brokers.

But the US and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization it dominates never mention that it is NATO's continuous eastward expansion over the past decades that has broken the delicate security equilibrium in Europe, a root cause of the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

Nor does Washington want the world to realize that it is the US itself that has been drawing tremendous benefits from the crisis in its bid to maintain its hegemony by tightening its control over Europe, weakening Russia and isolating China. Not to mention that the US is making huge profits from energy and arms deals.

As the US is paying almost no cost in this profit-making process, Washington will continue to prolong the conflict for as long as it can under the banner of defending sovereignty and freedom.

Peace-loving nations should offer their support to China's mediation endeavors, as these will gradually show their worth.

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Contact us at:

China Daily
15 Huixin Dongjie Chaoyang District, Beijing 100029
News: +86 (0) 10 6491-8366
editor@chinadaily.com.cn
Advertisement: +86 (0) 10 6491-8631
ads@chinadaily.com.cn
Subscription: +86-400-699-0203
subscription.chinadaily.com.cn
App: www.chinadaily.com.cn/mobile/daily.html

China Daily UK
90 Cannon St, London EC4N 6HA, UK
+44 (0) 207 398 8270
editor@chinadailyuk.com

China Daily Asia Pacific
China Daily Hong Kong
Unit 1818, Hing Wai Centre, 7 Tin Wan Praya Road, Aberdeen, Hong Kong
+852 2518 5111
editor@chinadailyhk.com
editor@chinadailyasia.com

China Daily USA
1500 Broadway, Suite 2800, New York, NY 10036
+1 212 537 8888
editor@chinadailyusa.com

China Daily Africa
P.O. Box 27281-00100, Nairobi, Kenya
+254(0)20 242 8589 (Nairobi)
editor@chinadailyafrica.com
enquiries@chinadailyafrica.com
subscription@chinadailyafrica.com

Ma Xuejing

Opinion Line

Sino-Indian relations shall not be defined only by border disputes

In a speech at the Anant National University in Ahmedabad, India, on Saturday, Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar highlighted a "very complicated challenge" from China, which is "very visible" in border areas in the past three years, adding that both countries have to find an equilibrium in ties.

India's top diplomat was to some extent correct to point out that mutual respect, sensitivity and interest have to be the basis of the relationship. However, he has to be reminded that the Narendra Modi government has been putting the cart before the horse for too long in dealing with India's largest neighbor.

The border dispute was created by British colonialists just the way they sowed discord between India and Pakistan. Yet China and India have a solid foundation to solve the dispute thanks to the fact that the two neighbors have had thousands of years of peaceful coexistence, friendly exchanges and trade relations based on mutual respect. They were also pillars of the less-developed countries' campaign to strive for national independence, liberation and development in the last century.

Their economic size, population and key role in the global industry and supply chains give them broad space for win-win economic and trade cooperation. However, that potential is yet to be tapped, as some politicians in New Delhi blindly follow the United States' China-containment strategy.

China is open to investment from India, and encourages the public to view relations with India rationally. China has never joined any bloc against India. Instead, it seeks cooperation with India in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and under the BRICS mechanism.

The Indian government, in contrast, holds discriminatory policies against Chinese businesses and enterprises, and indulges in narrow nationalism against China. It has actively joined the Quad group the US has set up to contain China, as well as being open to Washington's "Indo-Pacific" strategy with China in its crosshair.

China and India are important players for global economic growth and for promoting the reform of the international order, global governance and resolution of global challenges.

There is no reason for New Delhi not to work with Beijing to build "guardrails" to prevent the border disputes from hijacking the overall development of bilateral ties as some external forces expect.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

Japan must stop making noises over Taiwan

According to Japanese news outlet Sankei, some members of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party held a discussion with Chinese guests on the Taiwan Strait situation last week. At the meeting, Sun Jianguo, head of China Institute for International Strategic Studies, asked what Japan would think if the island of Okinawa were to seek independence, arousing fierce opposition from LDP lawmakers.

It seems the Japanese legislators are so patriotic that they cannot tolerate someone even alluding to a part of the country seeking independence. They should, therefore, understand that the Chinese people hold the same view about national unity.

It is common knowledge that Ryukyu was an independent Asian nation until 1875 when the Imperial Japanese Army occupied it by force. In 1879, they annexed and renamed it Okinawa. Even after so many years, some Okinawa residents still want independence. In contrast, Taiwan has been a part of China since time immemorial, a fact that cannot be denied. So if Japan is so possessive about a piece of land it annexed 150 years ago, why should it challenge China's claim on a territory that has always been its own?

China has repeatedly made it clear that there is only one China and Taiwan is a part of the country. Even though a few secessionists on the island are seeking "independence" and trying to get help from political forces in the United States and Japan, they don't alter the fact that both the US and Japanese governments recognize the one-China principle.

Some Japanese politicians need to learn some basics of diplomacy. If they want other countries to respect their national unity, they must reciprocate, too. If they claim that their territory is indivisible, then they need to know that their neighbor's territory is no less sacred.

— ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

What They Say

C919 can raise domestic industry to new heights

Airbus and Boeing offered their congratulations on the success of the first flight of the C919, China's domestically manufactured passenger jet of a similar size as the Boeing 737 and Airbus 380, from Shanghai to Beijing on Sunday. And the voice of some is high at home that the C919 can make China able to compete with the European and US companies in the commercial aircraft market.

However, even if the Commercial Aircraft Corporation of China can increase its annual production capacity of the C919 to 150 in five years as planned, that will still be far from enough to meet even the demand of the Chinese market, which will need more than 6,000 such single-aisle jetliners over the next 20 years. As such, Boeing and Airbus will still dominate the international and even the Chinese market for the next 20 years.

Indeed, the C919's entry into the market can be seen as a sign of self-reliance in China's civil airliner industry. However, it must also be pointed out that, like the products of Airbus and Boeing, the C919 is a product of cooperation in the global industry and supply chains.

Comac, the main manufacturer of the C919, is responsible for overall product design, establishing the supply chain, final assembly and optimization, while components such as the frame, engine and airborne equipment are outsourced to suppliers, including a large number of foreign companies and joint ventures.

As a commercial aircraft manufacturer, Comac must always make safety its priority, and what it needs to do is to provide reliable equipment rather than blindly pursue the localization rate of the plane. Even Boeing and Airbus never pursue a high localization rate, but constantly cultivate reliable and high-quality global suppliers, in order to achieve a win-win situation. Suppliers make 90 percent of Boeing's components, leaving Boeing itself responsible for only a few parts and assembly tasks.

But China has its own commercial aircraft system integration capability and manufacturing platform, and can deliver the large-scale operation in the market. It can also develop its own various subsystems with the help of the platform. That is to say, the C919 can become a "new engine" to drive the development of China's aviation industry and high-end manufacturing industry.

At the same time, it will also help relevant Chinese industries improve their level of international cooperation, forming global supply chains that gather in Shanghai, where Comac is headquartered, and strengthen the core capabilities such as R&D, design, final assembly and manufacturing, and customer service.

That said, the C919 marks only a beginning for the country on the track of single-aisle jetliners.

— 21ST CENTURY BUSINESS HERALD

VIEWS

Chetan Ahya

Asia: A constructive growth story

We have been constructive on Asia's growth outlook, arguing that 2023 will be a year of rapid disinflation and growth outperformance. However, investors tend to view Asia as a derivative of the US business cycle due to its export dependency. They also tend to under-appreciate the domestic demand that Asian economies can generate in this cycle. In particular, one key difference is that unlike the United States, Asia does not face an intense inflation challenge and does not have to contend with an interest rate shock.

The disconnect between our and investors' views is most apparent for China and India. For China, we expect GDP growth of 5.7 percent in 2023. Investors' bullishness has given way to concerns about a faltering recovery, especially given what they perceive to be weak April data. Investors also worry that policy stimulus might not be as forthcoming.

Part of this disconnect is down to the nature of this recovery. Unlike previous cycles, this recovery will be driven more by consumption. The consumption recovery is organic and not driven by excessive transfers. This means middle- to high-income consumers will support the recovery initially, before job gains in the services sector boosts labor income for the low- to middle-income segments. Against this backdrop, we also expect services spending to drive the initial rebound before goods spending normalizes later as the recovery progresses.

If growth momentum were to weaken, policymakers would take up easing in a way that would improve labor market conditions.

Indeed, this was what other economies in Asia outside of China experienced in 2022.

From this perspective, the April data did show a rebound in consumption that is driven by services spending, as mobility-sensitive segments within retail sales strengthened. This has been carried into May, as we saw in the data around travel and spending during the May Day holiday, with even international travel picking up. As for goods spending, we had expected it to improve a bit later as the recovery broadened. In early May, however, we saw early positive signs in car sales and durable goods like household appliances picking up.

While we do not expect investment to be a key driver of growth, our base case was that the drag from real estate investment would reduce in 2023. In that context, the deceleration in real estate fixed asset investment (FAI) does raise the risk that investment growth could re-emerge as a drag on growth. However, we do expect property sales to pick up again as more projects are launched, which will translate into an improvement in real estate FAI.

The biggest downside in the April data was from industrial production, which we attribute to an overhang of inventory — as was observed in the elevated levels of the inventory sub-index within the purchasing managers' index for both March and April. In this context, we see the evolution of the April data mix of strong consumption, modest growth in investment but downside in production as being still consistent with our growth outlook.

As for policy stimulus, we believe that the key anchor is the state of the labor market. While the overall unemployment rate has declined over the past three months, disposable income growth is still at just 5.1 percent year-on-year, well below where it was before the COVID-19 pandemic, suggesting that the overall state of the labor market is still relatively weak.

Moreover, the youth unemployment rate has risen, and is far above the level seen in 2019, which itself was not a strong year for growth. If growth momentum were to weaken, policymakers would take up easing in a way that would improve labor market conditions.

Turning to India, we project that GDP growth will average 6.2 percent this year, but investors are concerned about the current account deficit emerging as a constraint to this cyclical recovery. However, there has been a structural shift in India's balance of payments dynamics.

First, the boom in services exports (which rose by more than 80 percent from October 2020 levels to an annualized run rate of $360 billion as of April 2023) has supported India's current account balances. We expect the current account deficit to be below 2 percent of GDP over the next 18 months.

Besides, investors seem to be under-appreciating the strong string of supply-side reforms — introduction of a unified goods and services tax, reduction in corporate taxes, the launch of the production-linked incentive scheme over the last few years. Policymakers have already lifted public capital expenditure to GDP ratios to an 18-year high. This reform momentum, alongside very healthy private sector balance sheets, is catalyzing a strong upswing in the private capital expenditure cycle. More broadly speaking, capital deepening in an economy with surplus labor will be a key driver in lifting corporate profit to GDP.

With the sustained strength in domestic demand, we think that Asia will continue to build up growth outperformance against developed markets over the remainder of 2023, with its growth differentials rising to 460 basis points — its highest since 2017. In 2023-24, Asia will contribute 80 percent to global GDP growth, the strongest amongst all key regions.

The author is Morgan Stanley's chief Asia economist.
The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Li Jia

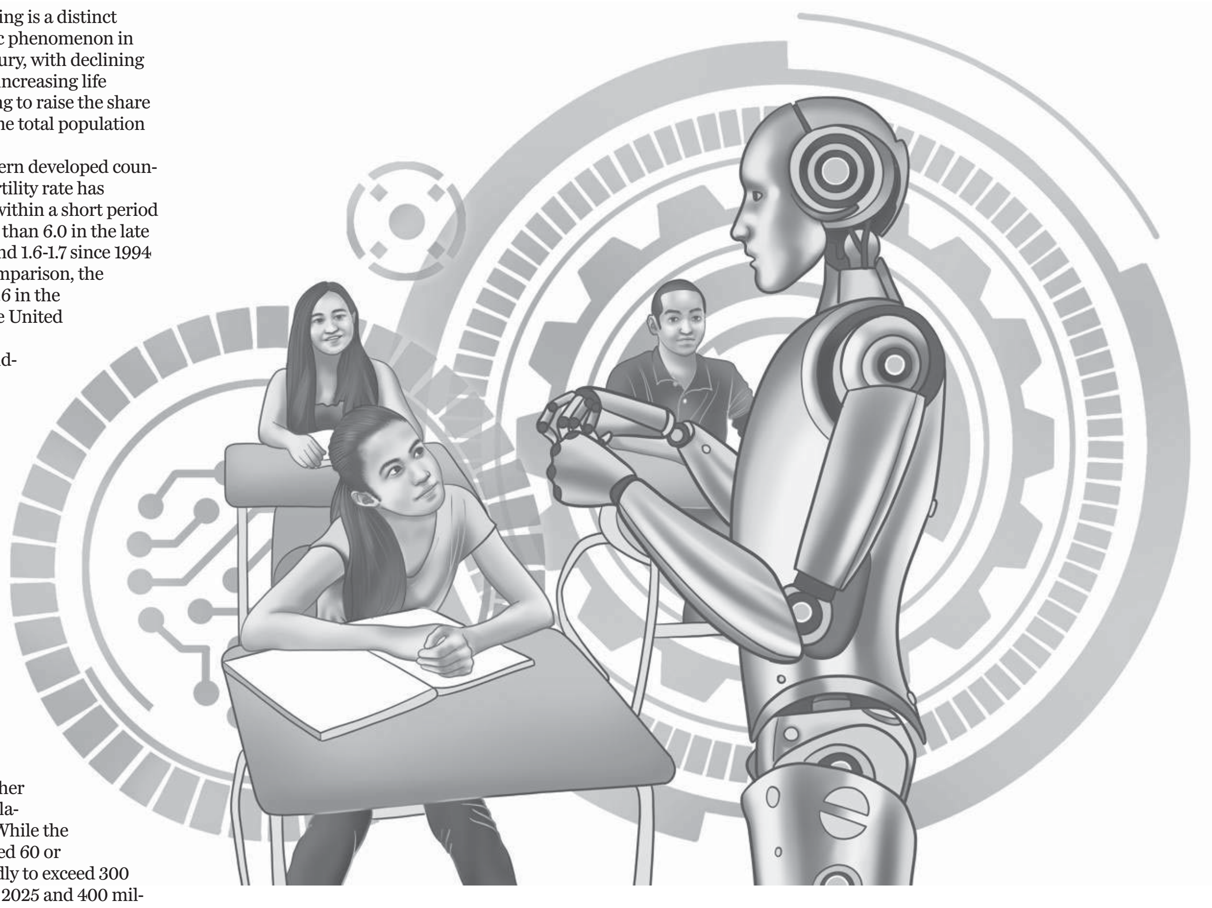
From demographic dividend to talent dividend

Population aging is a distinct demographic phenomenon in the 21st century, with declining fertility and increasing life expectancy combining to raise the share of elderly people in the total population of many countries.

But unlike in Western developed countries, China's total fertility rate has declined drastically within a short period of time — from more than 6.0 in the late 1960s to 2.1 in 1991 and 1.6-1.7 since 1994 to 1.07 in 2022. In comparison, the total fertility rate is 1.6 in the United States and the United Kingdom, and 1.3 in Japan, which is considered a "super-aged" society.

China's current total fertility rate of 1.07 is well below replacement fertility of 2.1. Replacement fertility refers to the total fertility rate at which women give birth to enough babies to sustain population levels.

As China's total population is nearing its peak, low fertility and aging together will change the population's age structure. While the number of people aged 60 or above will grow rapidly to exceed 300 million by the end of 2025 and 400 million by 2033, the share of working-age people and children (aged 0-14 years) in the total population will continue to shrink.



JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

As a long-term effect of the low fertility rate, the working-age population which peaked in 2011 at more than 900 million is expected to decline by nearly a quarter, to about 700 million, by the middle of this century. As a result, every 100 working-age people will have to support 106 elderly people and/or children.

The changing demographic structure will affect the population size and age structure, reflecting the complex features and structure of society.

First, the low total fertility rate together with population aging will have a huge impact on families, affecting intra-family relations and weakening family care, leading to more dysfunctional families. And the transformation of the traditional family structure will prompt people to find other ways to connect with each other, reflecting diversified communication.

Second, the elderly population's requirements will grow, as many face increasing risks due to higher life expectancy, poverty, illness and/or disability. Hence, eldercare services and the public health system need to be improved to meet their requirements.

To promote the long-term, balanced development of the population, it is necessary to foster a fertility-friendly society, mesh childbirth policies with related economic and social policies, and offer incentives to encourage couples to have two to three children.

Third, the shrinking numbers of children and working-age people will result in a shortage of workforce and rising cost of labor, weakening the competitiveness of labor-intensive enterprises. To adapt to the new population age structure and major changes in production factors, efforts should be made to alter the existing production methods, development models, growth drivers, income distribution patterns, supply and demand systems, and the industrial structure.

Fourth, the changing demographics have also impacted China's filial piety culture and the institution of marriage. They will bring about changes in the education sector as well. In the short term, the previously limited basic educational resources could become surplus due to the continuous decline in the school-age children's population, affecting resource allocation and creating structural imbalance in education resources. In the long run, the negative population growth could weaken the demand for higher education, affecting the education layout.

So efforts should be made to fix the new education objectives and syllabus, in order to turn demographic dividend into talent dividend by building a strong pool of talents.

The declining fertility rate will first affect preschool education. According to Ministry of Education data, the number of kindergarten and preschool enrollments in 2022 was nearly 46.3 million, down 1.7 million year-on-year. There were a total of 289,200 kindergartens nationwide in 2022, and the number of kindergartens in China has dropped for the first time in 15 years, falling by more than 5,000 than last year. Many kindergartens, especially those privately-owned, are facing financial problems, with some even being forced to shut down due to fewer students enrolled.

The falling birth rate will not only reduce the demand for kindergartens but also shrink the market for children's products, including toys. But while schools in towns, counties and smaller cities are likely to see a decline in new admissions, those in big cities may not be affected much due to the continued migration from rural areas to cities.

Enrollments in high schools, vocational schools and private universities, too, may fall in the future, because the number of students taking the college entrance exam is expected to fall from 11.93 million in 2022 to about 7.13 million in 2040, according to the Pangoal Institution. And although reputable public universities may not face tough challenges, some universities might be forced to shut down.

The changing population age structure also means corresponding changes in the elderly people's lifestyle in terms of living space, family relations, consumption pattern, physical and psychological health, social networking, and ways of socializing. The low fertility rate and population aging will not only bring socio-political and strategic changes in different countries, but also impact international relations and geopolitics, which could affect global cooperation given the complex political and legal systems followed by countries around the world.

The author is deputy head of the Aging Society Research Center at the Pangoal Institution.
The views don't necessarily represent those of China Daily.

Harald Brüning

G7 'de-risking' policy risky for Sino-US ties

The recent G7 summit in Hiroshima, Japan, concluded with the release of a Leaders' Communique, which among other things, said the Western powers "stand together" on nine "elements underpinning" their respective relations with China, apart from claiming that "there is no legal basis for China's expansive maritime claims in the South China Sea".

On the one hand, the communique seems to extend an olive branch to Beijing by pledging that "our policy approaches are not designed to harm China nor do we seek to thwart China's economic progress" and insisting that "we stand prepared to build constructive and stable relations with China" and that G7 states are "not decoupling" from China.

On the other hand, it says: "We recognize that economic resilience requires de-risking and diversifying". The term "de-risking" sounds like a politically innocent reference to a practice common in the business world, especially the financial sector. The US Department of State describes de-risking as the phenomenon of financial institutions terminating or restricting business relationships with clients or categories of clients to avoid, rather than manage, risk.

A 2016 article by the World Bank, titled "De-risking in the Financial Sector", warned that "de-risking practices by global financial institutions threaten to cut off access to the global financial system for remittance companies and local banks in certain regions, putting them at risk of losing access to the global financial system".

As the world's biggest and second-biggest economies, the US and China play a preeminent role in global trade and investment relations.

And according to the Council of Europe, "'De-risking' should never be an excuse for the private sector to avoid implementing a risk-based approach." Vistage Worldwide, Inc, a US-based executive coaching organization, points out that for entrepreneurs de-risking and re-risking are a "liberating decision-making strategy", that is, a way to repeatedly adjust risk levels. Inherently, both de-risking and re-risking are risky operations.

"De-risking", incidentally, has become the latest favorite term of many Western politicians (European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has developed a particular liking for the term) to describe their relations with China. It is no longer just a business term but a political shibboleth in Washington, Brussels and elsewhere in the West.

According to the G7 communique, "de-risking" means the G7 countries "will reduce excessive dependencies in our critical supply chains". The terms "excessive" and "critical" are, of course, a matter of opinion. As the world's biggest and second-biggest economies, the US and China play a preeminent role in global trade and investment relations.

But since the European Union is a supranational entity whose 27 member states compete with each other for economic opportunities in, for instance, China, EU countries should be extra cautious in "de-risking" their economic ties with China, because rival EU states' governments are likely to compete through their different "de-risking" strategies with each other in overseas markets.

Besides, some Western politicians may be using the term "de-risking" as a convenient euphemism for "de-coupling" with China perhaps because the latter term has gone out of fashion.

Accusing China of "economic coercion" without mentioning at least one alleged case is both insolent and impudent — and an insult to 1.4 billion Chinese people.

The G7 summit concluded with a ray of hope, though, that Sino-US relations could be on the mend, with US President Joe Biden saying at a news conference on Sunday: "I think you're going to see that (Sino-US ties) to begin to thaw very shortly." Let's hope his words become reality soon. The world would be a better place if that happens.

China's new ambassador to the United States, Xie Feng, got to the heart of the matter upon arriving in New York en route to the embassy in Washington early last week. Xie said the Sino-US "relationship is too important for us to let it fail", adding that "working together, both will come out as winners; fighting each other, both will lose, and the world will be hurt as well".

I hope political realists still hold enough influential positions in the US to be able to put the world's most consequential bilateral relations back on the right track.

The author is the director of the Macau Post Daily.
The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

WORLD

China backs Serbia in defending sovereignty

By MO JINGXI
mojingxi@chinadaily.com.cn

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said on Tuesday that China supports Serbia's endeavor to safeguard sovereignty and territorial integrity and that it attaches great importance to the relevant situation.

China opposes unilateral actions by the temporary institutions in Pristina and calls on it to perform its duty of establishing an association/community of Serb majority municipalities, Mao said.

"We urge NATO to genuinely respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the relevant country and do things that are truly conducive to regional peace," Mao said at a regular news conference in Beijing.

On Monday, Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic said over 50 civilians and more than 40 NATO soldiers were injured in a clash between NATO's Kosovo Force, or KFOR, and Serb protesters in front of the Zvecan municipality building in northern Kosovo.

Kosovo unilaterally declared independence from Serbia in 2008. Serbia rejects it and considers Kosovo as its own province.

KFOR units were trying to disperse a group of Serbs who protested after Kosovo police took control of the administrative buildings in Zvecan and two other municipalities in Serb-majority areas.

"A member of ROSU (Regional Operations Support Unit of Kosovo Police), not a member of KFOR, fired several bullets in the direction of the retreating Serbs and hit (local Serb) Dragisa Galjak with two bullets," Vucic said at an extraordinary news conference on Monday evening. "Serbs responded with stones and in other ways."

He said 52 Serbs were injured in the clashes — three in serious condition — and four were detained.

On Tuesday, Vucic was due to meet ambassadors of the so-called Quint group — France, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom and the United States — in Belgrade and was later due to meet the Russian and Chinese ambassadors to Serbia.

Kosovo's Serbs boycotted the April 23 local elections in four municipalities in the north of Kosovo, which allowed ethnic Albanian parties to take control of local administrations despite a turnover of less than 3.5 percent.

Combat readiness

Due to the intensification of ethnic clashes in Kosovo, Serbia has put the country's armed forces on combat readiness and sent its forces along the administrative line.

In the Kenyan capital Nairobi, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov described the situation in Kosovo as "worrisome", blaming the US and NATO for claiming dominance in that part of the world.

"A big 'explosion' is brewing in the center of Europe, in the very place where, in 1999, NATO carried out aggression against Yugoslavia," he said.

The NATO bombing of Yugoslavia started on March 24, 1999. Over the course of 78 days, 2,500 people were killed and thousands more were wounded, while 25,000 homes and one-third of the country's energy sector were destroyed — often by illegal weapons such as cluster bombs and depleted uranium warheads.

Xinhua and agencies contributed to this story.

NATO's Kosovo Force soldiers clash with Serb civilians on Monday at the entrance of the municipality office in the town of Zvecan, in northern Kosovo. LAURA HASANI / REUTERS

Russia shoots down eight drones near Moscow

By REN QI in Moscow
renqi@chinadaily.com.cn

Russia's Defense Ministry accused Ukraine on Tuesday of a "terrorist attack", saying it had intercepted all of the eight Ukrainian drones aimed at Moscow.

"This morning the Kyiv regime carried out a terrorist attack with drones on targets in the city of Moscow," the ministry said on social media. "Eight drones were used in the attack. All of the enemy drones were downed."

There were no reports of deaths.

The drone attack was the biggest on the Russian capital since President Vladimir Putin ordered the February 2022 special military operation in Ukraine. Nobody has yet claimed responsibility.

Moscow Mayor Sergey Sobyanin said two people were injured, one of whom was hospitalized, in the early morning attack. Residents of several parts of two apartment blocks had been evacuated but later returned.

"Early this morning, as a result of the drone attack, minor damage occurred in several buildings," Sobyanin said. "No one has been seriously injured."

Some residents of a building on Profsoyuznaya Street in the city's south were being evacuated, Russia's state RIA news agency reported.

A video posted on social media showed what appeared to be a drone being shot down and a plume of smoke rising over the city skyline.

Moscow's airports remained open.

It was the most serious attack on Moscow since Nazi attacks during World War II, Russian lawmaker Maxim Ivanov said, adding no citizen could now avoid what he said was "the new reality".

Russia's investigative committee said a number of drones were shot down and that there was minor damage due to the falling wreckage, but did not specify the number (of drones).

The Telegram channel Baza, which has good sources among Russia's security services, said about 25 drones attacked the capital. Moscow business daily RBK cited an unidentified interior ministry source as saying that more than 10 drones were shot down.

Andrei Vorobyov, governor of the Moscow region, said on Telegram that several drones were shot down on their approach to Moscow.

The attack on Moscow came after two drones exploded over the Kremlin on May 3 in an attack that Russian officials blamed on Ukraine, which denied involvement.

Ukrainian drone attacks inside Russia have been growing in intensity in recent weeks. The United States intelligence believes Ukraine was behind the drone attack on the Kremlin, The New York Times reported.

Russian territories close to Ukraine have come under repeated attack in recent months and the Defense Ministry in Moscow said last week that troops defeated an incursion by attackers who crossed the border into the Belgorod region.

Agencies via Xinhua contributed to this story.

A damaged multistory apartment block is seen following reported drone attacks in Moscow on Tuesday. MAXIM SHEMETOV / REUTERS

IAEA arrives in Japan for final review of discharge plan

By WANG XU
wangxu@chinadaily.com.cn

An International Atomic Energy Agency task force has arrived in Tokyo for its final review of Japan's plan to release Fukushima nuclear-contaminated water into the Pacific Ocean.

The mission will last from Monday to Friday, during which experts from 11 countries, including China and the Republic of Korea, will visit the crippled Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant and meet with Japanese officials, Tokyo Electric Power Company and Japan's nuclear watchdog Nuclear Regulation Authority, the IAEA said.

"The task force will use this opportunity to receive updates from TEPCO and the government of Japan regarding their work over the past few months and to confirm our understanding of different technical details — this will help us as we prepare the comprehensive assessment of the safety of Japan's plan for the water release," Gustavo Caruso, chairman of the task force, said.

The IAEA has repeatedly conducted inspections in Japan since February last year, and its final comprehensive report is expected to be released in June.

In April 2021, Japan unilaterally announced its decision to dump more than 1.3 million metric tons of treated but still radioactive water into the sea. The move sparked fierce protests from local fishing communities and neighboring countries, including China, the ROK, Russia and Pacific Island countries.

Under Japan's plan, TEPCO will gradually discharge the nuclear-contaminated water from this year. In all, the release would be sufficient to fill about 500 Olympic-sized swimming pools.

The water has been used to cool highly radioactive damaged reactor cores, as a massive earthquake and tsunami in 2011 destroyed the Fukushima plant's cooling systems, triggering the meltdown of three reactors and the release of large amounts of radiation.

Liu Qingbin, former professor at Yokohama National University's Institute of Advanced Sciences in Japan, said Japan had lost its credibility of dealing with the Fukushima disaster over the years and the IAEA must not be fooled by Japan's superficial skills.

"Actions speak louder than words," Liu said. "If you want to review, let's review this: The absence of safety measures prevented taking adequate precautions to avoid the nuclear accident. The delayed response led to further damage and risks, and the lack of transparency made people miscalculate their potential health exposure because of radiation."

McCarthy faces GOP pushback over debt deal

Bill may meet obstacles in Congress as Republicans threaten to oppose it

By HENG WEILI in New York
hengweili@chinadailyusa.com

US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy is facing an outcry from members of his Republican Party after he struck a deal with President Joe Biden to raise the debt ceiling.

Over the Memorial Day weekend, McCarthy and Biden, a Democrat, agreed on a two-year deal that would raise the United States' $31.4 trillion debt ceiling by $4 trillion.

The deal will still have to be approved by the US Congress before the debt-default deadline on Monday.

Despite reaching the current debt limit in January, discussions between the White House and Congressional leaders only began on May 9.

Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, a candidate for the Republican 2024 presidential nomination, said the deal does not do enough to change the country's fiscal trajectory.

"Prior to this deal our country was careening toward bankruptcy. And after this deal, our country will still be careening toward bankruptcy," he said on Fox News.

"The deal green-lights $4 trillion in new debt over the next year and a half, locks in inflated levels of spending from COVID, and keeps 98 percent of the Biden IRS expansion."

McCarthy had vowed to block the $80 billion White House spending to hire 87,000 new Internal Revenue Service tax agents. However, the number agreed to in the deal was a small reduction to $78.1 billion.

"So there will be 85,260 more IRS agents rather than 87,000 to eat you alive. Big win," tweeted Representative Dan Bishop, a North Carolina Republican.

The deal needs only a simple majority to pass, so even if several Republicans vote against it, it is likely to clear Congress before Monday, the day the Treasury Department said the US would run out of money to pay its bills.

"This thing will absolutely pass. There's no question about that," said Republican Representative Dusty Johnson of South Dakota, who said he had talked to dozens of fellow lawmakers.

Biden said he had been working the phones to ensure the vote passes. "It feels good. We'll see when the vote starts," he told reporters.

In a Twitter post on Sunday heralding the agreement, McCarthy received almost a uniformly negative response, with most saying he "caved" in.

"President Biden claimed he'd never negotiate," the Republican speaker wrote. "(Senate Majority) Leader (Charles) Schumer insisted there'd be a 'clean' debt increase. They were wrong. Republicans fought to spend less, block Biden's new tax proposals, claw back unspent COVID money, and fully fund our veterans and defense priorities."

Overall, the 99-page bill is a trade-off that would impose some spending reductions for the next two years along with a suspension of the debt limit into January 2025, pushing the volatile political issue past the next presidential election. Raising the debt limit would allow Treasury to continue borrowing to pay the country's already incurred bills.

Key test

A key test would come on Tuesday afternoon when the House Rules Committee is scheduled to consider the package and vote on sending it to the full House for a vote expected on Wednesday. Although the panel is normally closely aligned with House leadership, McCarthy appointed some conservatives in exchange for support of him becoming the speaker.

One of those conservatives, Representative Chip Roy of Texas, said on Monday he did not support the bill.

"It's not a good deal," Roy wrote on Twitter. "Some $4 trillion in debt for — at best — a two-year spending freeze and no serious substantive policy reforms."

In the Senate, Republican Mike Lee of Utah also came out against the bill, which could point to a tight vote there, where any member has the power to delay action for days.

House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries of New York said he expects support from his side of the aisle, though many on his party's progressive left may vote "no" as well.

But making any changes to the package at this stage seems highly unlikely with so little time to spare. Congress and the White House are racing to meet the Monday deadline now less than a week away. That is when Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen has said the US would run short of cash and face an unprecedented debt default without action.

Agencies contributed to this story.

Wading through

A car wades through a flooded road following heavy rainfall in Ankara, Turkiye, on Monday. UTKU UCRAK / ANADOLU AGENCY VIA GETTY IMAGES

Countries meet in Paris for talks on plastics treaty

By JONATHAN POWELL
in London
jonathan@mail.chinadailyuk.com

Representatives from nearly 200 countries are meeting in Paris this week to continue debate on a global plastics treaty, with nations favoring a limit on the production of plastics as the principal goal and the petrochemical trade preferring a target of "circularity" or recycling.

The latest talks, which began on Monday, seek a solution based on a report produced by the host of the meeting, the United Nations Environment Programme, which set the aim of reducing plastic waste by 80 percent by 2040.

Published earlier this month, the report outlined three core areas of action: Reuse, recycling and reorientation of plastic packaging to alternative materials.

Humanity produces more than 430 million metric tons of plastic annually, two-thirds of which are products that quickly become waste and can eventually end up in the human food chain, the UNEP said.

This week's gathering is the second of five meetings planned in order to reach a conclusion to negotiations by the end of next year. At the first meeting in Uruguay six months ago, countries discussed the possibility of global mandates, national solutions and a combination of both.

But there has been disagreement, with delegates still undecided on the treaty's key objectives, such as what kind of plastics it will focus on, and countries also need to address important issues such as financing policies, implementation and accountability, The Associated Press reported.

The report focuses too much on waste management, environmental groups said, which they regard as a concession to the global plastics and petrochemicals industry.

A coalition of 55 countries is pushing for a strong treaty with restrictions on hazardous chemicals and prohibitions on difficult-to-recycle plastics, Reuters reported.

"We have a responsibility to protect human health in our environment from the most harmful polymers and chemicals of concern through the treaty," said Rwanda's Minister of Environment Jeanne d'Arc Mujawamariya, who is co-chair of the High Ambition Coalition to End Plastic Pollution.

Inger Andersen, UNEP's executive director, told Reuters that any criticism of recycling in the UN report ignored its general proposals.

"We're talking about redesign, and when we're talking redesign, it's everything that we need to do so that we use less plastic. That's where it begins," she said.

Bjorn Beeler, international coordinator with the International Pollutants Elimination Network, told AP that countries need a clear plan by the end of this week to write up an initial draft of the treaty text, so it can be negotiated at the third meeting.

"If there's no text to negotiate, you're just continuing to share ideas," he said. "Then because of the timeline, we could be looking at an early failure."

WORLD

Nepal marks day to honor climbers of Qomolangma

By XU WEIWEI in Hong Kong
vivienxu@chinadailyapac.com

May 29 is a special day to salute the remarkable achievements of those who have faced challenges to successfully scale the world's highest peak, Qomolangma, also known as Mount Everest in the West.

It is also a day for paying tribute to the mountaineers, guides, and explorers who have sacrificed their lives while climbing.

Nepal marked the 70th International Everest Day on Monday. The Ministry of Culture, Tourism, and Civil Aviation of Nepal is leading the celebrations. The world's mountaineering community participated in the events to mark the occasion, according to wionews.com.

This year, there's a new hero, the 53-year-old Kami Rita Sherpa. Last week, he reached the summit of Qomolangma a record 28 times since his first ascent in 1994, holding the record for the most number of ascents.

"Everest Day is also a celebration of human ability to go beyond our limits, and a celebration of reaching the top of the world," said Binod Adhikari, director of the Himalayan documentary *Everest Man*, which chronicles Sherpa's adventures.

On May 29, 1953, Sir Edmund Hillary of New Zealand and Tenzing Norgay Sherpa of Nepal reached the summit of Qomolangma.

The day of the successful ascent of the mountain peak has since been celebrated in Nepal as the Everest Day. The nation began commemorating the day after Hillary's death in 2008.

The day is also special for another reason: It is the birthday of Tenzing Norgay Sherpa.

The day aims to promote Qomolangma and Nepal, said Arbindra Prajapati, a country manager for Nepal Airlines.

According to him, sharing the world's highest peak with China, Nepal is a beautiful country with the potential to attract many foreigners, but it saw fewer tourists due to the pandemic. This kind of campaign can raise awareness about the possibilities of mountain tourism in Nepal.

"The government of Nepal has already opened many low-height peaks for mountaineering," he said. "Being a national carrier, we would like to carry guests to Nepal on our own aircraft with warm Nepali gestures and hospitality."

The day also serves as an excellent opportunity for promoting business and business tourism in Nepal, said Prakash Pun, president of Hong Kong-Nepalese Business Association.

At a celebration in Hong Kong, Kiran Kumar Gurung, the top diplomat at the consulate general of Nepal in Hong Kong and Macao, and his team screened the documentary, *Everest Man*.

Born in Thame, a small village in Nepal, Kami Rita hails from a family of mountaineers. His achievements have secured him a special place in the field of mountain climbing.

Building crash

A worker walks by a six-story apartment building after it collapsed on Monday in Davenport, Iowa. Eight people were rescued from the debris. SCOTT OLSON / GETTY IMAGES

Saudi Arabia aims high with SEZs

By JAN YUMUL in Hong Kong
jan@chinadailyapac.com

For special economic zones to thrive and not cannibalize a country's base economy, they need to have a clear purpose in filling gaps and have guardrails that complement national regulatory policies, said speakers at a forum in Saudi Arabia on Monday.

The speakers were part of a panel at the Saudi Special Economic Zones Investment Forum, which was held in Riyadh, just a month after Saudi Arabia introduced four new SEZs that will offer incentives for companies seeking to expand their business in the country. The panel also discussed the SEZs' ecosystem.

SEZs are areas within a country that usually have different regulations. The event also included a ceremony awarding the four SEZs their licenses, namely the King Abdullah Economic City SEZ, Ras Al-Khair SEZ, Jazan SEZ and the Cloud Computing SEZ. The SEZs have already attracted $12.6 billion from investors in the maritime, mining, manufacturing, logistics and tech sectors. An additional $31 billion in investments are in the works.

Saudi Finance Minister Mohammed Al-Jadaan said SEZs need to have a clear purpose and "not just create a special zone for creating a special zone", and that they need to fill a gap in the country's economy. He also said the SEZs need to be designed as a policy to give investors as much freedom as possible as they are largely export-oriented.

"We wanted to make sure that investors feel the freedom to select the talents that they need and not be constrained by the base economy regulations. Third, they need to complement and not compete against or cannibalize against the base economy," Al-Jadaan said.

He noted that "predictability" is key as incentives would be one of the things investors would be looking at, so the authorities have made it clear that incentives will be fixed for a certain period of time.

Saudi Human Resources and Social Development Minister Ahmed Al-Rajhi announced that one of the incentives is the exemption from Saudization requirements. Saudization is a nationalization scheme, which requires companies and enterprises to fill their workforce with Saudi nationals based on a quota.

"The SEZs that have been announced today are sector-specific and their aim is to attract global firms and certain industries," Al-Rajhi said.

Nabil Khojah, secretary-general of the Economic Cities and Special Zones Authority, said it has created specific tools to ensure the base economy is minimally impacted to protect it. One of those is the eligibility criteria because they "wanted to avoid migration from the base economy into the zones".

Zimbabwe commits to deeper China ties

Envoy: Relations with Beijing based on mutual respect, win-win cooperation

By XU WEI
xuwei@chinadaily.com.cn

Zimbabwe's top diplomat underscored on Tuesday the African nation's commitment to scaling up cooperation with China and borrowing the Chinese experience, while lashing out at the United States for mixing up development issues "with whole aspects of human rights".

Frederick Shava, the minister of foreign affairs and international trade of Zimbabwe, said in an interview in Beijing that his country's diplomatic relations with China are now at "a very high level" and based on solidarity, mutual respect and win-win cooperation.

He dismissed theories that the Belt and Road Initiative has led to debt traps for African countries, insisting that his country welcomed the inflow of Chinese investment on a win-win basis.

Shava, who is on a weeklong visit to China starting on Saturday, held talks with Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Qin Gang on Monday, a meeting that saw the two sides reaffirm the rock-solid traditional friendship.

"Zimbabwe's model of relationships with the People's Republic of China is based on mutual respect, solidarity, and a very brilliant past," he said.

He added that Zimbabwe seeks to learn from the Chinese experience over issues that China excels in, and Beijing has stood ready to share "on an equal footing".

Commenting on Washington's approach to building up its influence in Africa, he said: "They mix it up with the whole aspects of human rights. They think that we must be like them. We cannot be like them. We are not American, they are American.

"There is no horse-and-rider situation that we will tolerate in Zimbabwe," he added.

Trade between China and Zimbabwe grew by 29.1 percent year-on-year to $2.42 billion in 2022, and Shava is in Beijing to appeal for heightened trade and investment cooperation between the two nations.

Open for business

Speaking at a business forum on Tuesday, he said Zimbabwe is open for business.

"Let me assure you that Zimbabwe we continues to openly engage with the international community, particularly with China, in its quest for mutually beneficial investment and trade partnerships," he told a roomful of business leaders.

China continues to be Zimbabwe's top source of foreign direct investment, he said, adding that China has invested about $2.7 billion in Zimbabwe over the past four years and his country has issued close to 400 investment licenses to Chinese companies.

"This has contributed significantly to Zimbabwe's economic growth through employment creation, infrastructure development and modernization of the mining, manufacturing and agriculture sectors," he said.

Shava also appealed to private sectors from both nations to forge closer partnerships, especially in facilitating the imports of more new pieces of machinery to Zimbabwe and the development of the manufacturing and tourism sectors.

During the interview, he also lauded the expertise and resources of Chinese companies in developing some of the largest infrastructure projects in Zimbabwe.

Chinese companies are now working with their Zimbabwean counterparts on the expansion project of the Robert Gabriel Mugabe International Airport and another airport in Victoria Falls — projects that are expected to drastically increase the number of international flights the country can receive and boost the tourism sector.

Another landmark project built with Chinese assistance, the Parliament of Zimbabwe, is also ready for opening. "It is an iconic majestic building," Shava said.

The senior diplomat also lauded the significance of China's modernization and its positive implications for the world.

"I think China is growing in leaps and bounds in terms of modernizing itself and in terms of improving its own quality of products.

"Just looking at China and looking at the infrastructure that it has built. … This is a very positive influence," he said.

Rescue effort

People watch rescuers use a crane after a bus carrying Hindu pilgrims to a shrine skidded off a highway bridge into a gorge in India-controlled Kashmir, killing 10 people and injuring 55, on Tuesday. CHANNI ANAND / ASSOCIATED PRESS

Briefly

JAPAN

PM's son to resign amid public outrage

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said on Monday his son is resigning as his executive policy secretary, taking responsibility for using the prime minister's residence for a private party that triggered public outrage. Shotaro Kishida, the PM's eldest son, invited a group of people to a year-end party on Dec 30 at the Prime Minister's Official Residence. Kishida acknowledged he had briefly greeted the guests but said he didn't stay at the dinner party. He said he severely reprimanded his son for the party, but that failed to quell the criticism from opposition lawmakers and public outrage which have pushed down his support ratings. Kishida appointed his son as policy secretary in October. The appointment, was criticized as nepotism.

SPAIN

Sanchez calls snap election after drubbing

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez on Monday called for a snap election on July 23, a day after the ruling Socialists suffered a drubbing in local and regional polls. Widely seen as a dress rehearsal for a general election that had been expected at the end of the year, Sunday's polls saw the main opposition group, the Popular Party, or PP, chalk up the largest number of votes. The right-wing PP also scored significant gains at a regional level, seizing six regions that had been led by Socialists. But as pundits were mulling over the Socialists' drubbing in the polls, Sanchez stunned the political establishment by saying he had informed King Felipe VI of his decision to dissolve parliament and call a general election on July 23.

BRAZIL

Maduro meets Lula on first visit since 2015

Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro met on Monday with Brazilian leftist leader Luis Inacio Lula de Silva during his first visit to Brazil since 2015, taking advantage of warmer relations ahead of a regional summit. Brazil's former hard-right president Jair Bolsonaro had banned Maduro from entering Brazil when he took office in 2019, a measure that Lula lifted when he returned to power this year. Lula and Maduro met at the presidential palace and were scheduled to sign agreements.

DPRK

Pyongyang to launch military satellite

Amid the heightened military tensions on the Korean Peninsula, a senior official of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, or DPRK, stated the country's firm stance on bolstering up its self-defense capabilities, the country's state news agency reported on Tuesday, in response to the recent anti-DPRK military moves by the United States and the Republic of Korea. ROK on Monday "strongly" warned against the DPRK's planned satellite launch, according to Yonhap news agency.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Erdogan to keep bolstering Turkiye's regional influence

A person walks near a flag featuring an image of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Istanbul on Monday. HANNAH MCKAY / REUTERS

ANKARA — Incumbent Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has secured his third term after winning a runoff presidential election held on Sunday. Experts believe the veteran politician is likely to maintain a balance between the West and the East and keep positioning Turkiye as a regional heavyweight.

In Sunday's contest, Erdogan won 52.14 percent of the votes. The victory allows Erdogan to remain in power for another five years.

For a long time, the Turkish leader has enhanced Turkiye's strategic importance by attaching importance to the country's NATO membership on the international stage, and engaged in a delicate balancing act between the West and the East.

When he announced his election manifesto in April in Ankara, Erdogan hinted that his country will continue to play an active role in regional affairs.

"We will build the axis of Turkiye with a foreign policy where both our country, our region, and humanity will find peace and stability, multilateralism, more cooperation, peace, stability and humanitarian diplomacy," he said.

Batu Coskun, an independent political risk analyst in Ankara, said Erdogan is unlikely to change course, adding that a major task for the country would be to reconcile with former foes.

"Foreign policy-wise, I don't expect a vast shift from the previous foreign policy before the electoral cycle began," he said. A priority for Turkish diplomacy is to push for a reconciliation with Syria, he said.

Signs of thawing in Turkiye-Syria relations were seen last year at meetings with Turkish, Syrian and Russian ministers and officials in Moscow.

In the past few years, Turkiye has mended ties with Israel, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates following difficult regional isolation. Egypt is next in line in Turkiye's drive, Coskun said.

In a phone call on Monday, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi and Erdogan agreed to "immediately" upgrade diplomatic relations between the two countries and exchange ambassadors, the Egyptian presidency said in a statement.

"In a multipolar world, Turkiye strives for autonomy from the Western bloc, pursuing an independent foreign policy," a source close to the Turkish government said on the condition of anonymity.

Regarding Russia, analysts believe Ankara would continue to maintain close political and financial relations with Moscow, despite criticism from its Western allies.

"Turkiye's position on Russia is unlikely to change. Turkiye will continue to engage with Moscow and (President Vladimir) Putin financially, politically and strategically," Coskun said.

On relations with the United States, Erdogan expressed his desire in a media interview to cooperate with US President Joe Biden and his administration.

In a call on Monday, Biden said Erdogan repeated Ankara's desire to buy F-16 fighter jets from the US, while Biden told him Washington wanted Ankara to drop its objection to Sweden's joining NATO.

XINHUA—AGENCIES

WORLD

Youngsters proud to take 'bridge' to China

Finalists display proficiency in speech, demonstrate talent at Chinese language and culture competition

By CHANG JUN in San Francisco
junechang@chinadailyusa.com

Zakhar Likuev, a 10-year-old from the Hope Chinese Charter School in Oregon, fluently recited the *Three Character Classic*, commonly known as *San Zi Jing*, which highlights Confucian morality and wisdom.

Likuev, who waved a red ribbon and tapped his feet to the beat on Saturday, was among the six K-12 finalists who showcased their proficiency in the Chinese language and culture. They were competing for two seats in the International Chinese Bridge Finals this summer in Beijing.

According to Tang Jun, the education consul at the Chinese Consulate General in San Francisco, the six have defeated about 1,000 peers in earlier state-level preliminaries from Oregon, North Carolina, Minnesota, California and beyond, and represent the talent of the highest level in the Chinese language and culture studies in the United States.

Within an approximately 10-minute time frame, three elementary schoolers needed to finish a free topic speech themed "Chinese, Joy and Fun"; a Q&A session with a judges' panel; and a talent show.

The three middle schoolers needed to deliver a speech themed "Fly high with Chinese"; a Q&A session; a talent show; and were quizzed on their knowledge about current Chinese news, history and cultural anecdotes.

"We are especially excited to bring the 16th Chinese Bridge-Chinese Proficiency Competition for Foreign Secondary School Students and the 3rd Chinese Bridge-Chinese Show for Foreign Primary School Students back to an in-person setting this year," Tang said, adding that the competition was held online during the pandemic.

From left: Sage Houdek from the Yinghua Academy in Minneapolis, who won the championship in the elementary school category, poses with one of her Chinese paintings with calligraphy; Zakhar Likuev from the Hope Chinese Charter School in Oregon, takes a picture with his parents on Saturday after the Chinese Bridge competition; Ivana Moreno from Lick-Wilmerding High School in San Francisco, who won the championship in the middle school category, performs Chinese martial arts in the talent show on Saturday. PHOTOS BY CHANG JUN / CHINA DAILY

Sage Houdek, a fifth grader from the Yinghua Academy in Minneapolis, has the Chinese name Yan Lirui, which literally means "agile and wise". The 10-year-old, in red traditional Chinese costume, said she was "very lucky" to be able to attend a Chinese immersion program from an early age.

Although her first day at kindergarten was tough because she couldn't understand even one Chinese word and she cried to her parents, Houdek didn't quit.

Honing skills

The whole family cultivated a Chinese-learning environment, she said, citing the example of how they learned to use chopsticks. "We failed many times, but no one quit, and we finally had mastered the tricks," she said, adding that's why her favorite Chinese idiom is "One-minute glamour in the spotlight means (there has been) 10 years of tedious rehearsal down the stage".

Learning Chinese has opened the door, Houdek said, "through which I am able to better understand the other parts of the world".

Houdek also immerses herself in Chinese culture by studying holiday rituals, customs, Chinese calligraphy, drawings and dance, as well as playing traditional Chinese folk music on the violin.

"My family now observes the Chinese New Year the Chinese way — we decorate our house with red lanterns, paste the Spring Festival couplets, and make dumplings," she said.

Ivana Moreno, a ninth grader at Lick-Wilmerding High School in San Francisco, is grateful for having the opportunity to study China. "I have enriched my understanding not only about China, its culture and language, but also its people," said Moreno, who is called Meng Huixin in Chinese.

Born and raised in a non-Chinese speaking family, Moreno started learning three languages — Chinese, Spanish and English — at age 3.

To continue honing her Chinese skills, Moreno's parents dropped her off every Saturday morning at a Chinese couple's residence for a two-hour session — to learn Chinese brush painting from the husband and Chinese language from the wife.

Moreno attended a Chinese immersion school when she turned 5. Through a project-based curriculum such as constructing energy-saving houses for Chinese people; field study trips to China's Yunnan province; and random conversations with local citizens, Moreno has "made many friends, and came to realize differences in our cultures".

"People-to-people exchanges of this kind are so sincere, so warm, yet so powerful (and) lifted my understanding of China as a whole," Moreno said.

Moreno said she wants to be a teacher in the future. "I like children and believe it's rewarding to work with young minds," she said.

Zhang Jianmin, China's consul general in San Francisco, congratulated the contestants, particularly Houdek and Moreno, as both finished first in their respective categories.

"China feels proud of its 5,000 years of history and its rich culture," he said. "Both Chinese and American peoples are great, and we deserve better friendship and mutual understanding."

Li Yue, president of the Chinese Language Teachers Association of California, who has more than 20 years of Chinese-language teaching experience, sat on the judges' panel.

She said the depth and width of "Chinese Bridge" keep expanding over the years, as contestants demonstrate ever-improving linguistic and cultural talents, interests and achievements.

Joint efforts

"This is a nice outcome of joint efforts among educators, parents and our students," said Li. "Performances of contestants, in general, are very impressive."

Thomas Gold, another judge at Saturday's competition, said it is more urgent than ever for more young citizens to study China, its language and culture, as the bilateral relationship is facing severe challenges.

Gold, who was among the first US-government-funded exchange students and studied in Shanghai in the late 1970s, later became a sociology professor at UC Berkeley and worked as the executive director of a program for Chinese language studies there from 2006 to 2016.

"The more challenging the bilateral relationship, the more Americans we need to acquire adequate, pragmatic knowledge of China," Gold said. "Misconceptions and hostilities only recede when conversations begin."

Consul General Zhang said to contestants: "You represent the future. … It's important to appreciate other cultures even though we see many differences."

The Chinese Bridge Competition, an annual international Chinese language and culture contest, is sponsored by the Center for Language Education and Cooperation and conducted worldwide.

Foreigners conduct a livestreaming sale at the 2023 World E-commerce Conference held in Weifang, Shandong province. A view of the city of Weifang. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Expo highlights Weifang's e-commerce strengths

By LI YOU
liyou@chinadaily.com.cn

The inaugural Weifang International E-commerce Expo was held in Shandong province's Weifang city from Friday to Sunday to highlight the city's economic development achievements over the years and stimulate the growth of the local e-commerce industry.

Feng Bo, director of the Weifang bureau of commerce, said that in April 2020, Weifang was approved by the State Council to build the China (Weifang) Cross-border E-commerce Comprehensive Pilot Zone.

The city has taken the chance to set up an e-commerce development and service center and issued policies for facilitating high-quality development of cross-border e-commerce, Feng said.

The expo's exhibition area spanned 20,000 square meters and comprised nine sectors: e-commerce platforms and service providers, Weifang's key industries, a domestic high-quality product exhibition area, an imported product exhibition area, a real estate project exhibition area, as well as exhibitions showcasing the achievements of the China (Weifang) Cross-border E-commerce Comprehensive Pilot Zone, the Weifang Comprehensive Bonded Zone, the Weifang Cross-border E-commerce Research Institute, and the Shandong Signature Industry Exhibition Area.

In addition to the exhibition, several supplementary activities took place during the event, including the 2023 World E-commerce Conference. These activities provided distinct services, such as brand showcasing, product promotion, information release, and on-site contract signing for outstanding products.

The 2023 World E-commerce Conference took place on Friday. The heads of major e-commerce enterprises and institutions from over 10 countries and regions, such as Russia, France, Japan and the Republic of Korea participated.

The conference aimed to promote global exchanges and share experiences in e-commerce industry development; discuss trends in e-commerce development; and facilitate business opportunities.

The event also announced the "Top 10 E-Commerce Live Streaming Bases" and "Top 10 New Foreign Trade Formats" in Weifang. It provided a platform for a cross-border e-commerce-themed competition among business insiders in Shandong province.

The event also hosted the launch ceremony of a Weifang sellers' support program initiated by the e-commerce pioneer eBay and the standard formulation of burdock products.

On the same day, a cross-border e-commerce matchmaking event was held, which invited representatives from Weifang's key industrial clusters such as wood products, textiles, auto parts, gardening machinery, light industry craft, jewelry, musical instruments, building materials and other sectors. They were engaged in face-to-face negotiations with industry players.

Apart from the main events, a range of specialized promotion activities were held during the expo to promote commercialization.

On Saturday and Sunday, the organizers invited major business players and platforms to conduct on-site investigations of the city's counties, business clusters, and development zones, in an effort to bring more business opportunities to local enterprises.

The expo was hosted by the Shandong Department of Commerce and Weifang city government, and organized by the E-commerce Specialized Committee of China Association of Trade in Services and the Weifang Cross-border E-commerce Research Institute.

Su Jun, head of the E-commerce Specialized Committee of China Association of Trade in Services, said that the organizers made efforts to internationalize the event and improve its efficiency in order to achieve the goals of boosting the economy, driving consumption and promoting the development of the Weifang e-commerce industry.

The committee has invited institutions and enterprises from more than 10 countries and regions, including the United States, Russia, France, the ROK, Malaysia, Ireland, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia and Bangladesh to enlarge this event's influence.

Besides eBay, this event has brought together well-known domestic and foreign e-vendors including JD.com, Amazon, AliExpress, mengxiang.com, Made-in-China.com, Lazada, Pinduoduo, Qoo10, and OZON, as well as more than 100 manufacturers and buyers from Shanghai, Shenzhen, Guangzhou, Tianjin, Hangzhou, Yiwu, Ningbo, Qingdao and other cities in China, Su said.

In the past three years, the foreign trade volume of cross-border e-commerce increased from 140 million yuan ($19.8 million) in 2020 to 39 billion yuan in 2022. Currently, there are around 15,300 e-commerce enterprises and around 170,000 online stores in the city.

City boosts position as industrial powerhouse

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Weifang, a traditional industrial powerhouse in East China's Shandong province, has made remarkable achievements in industrial transformation and advanced manufacturing.

Manufacturing is Weifang's foundational and advantageous industry, according to the city government. Local officials said that one of the underlying reasons behind Weifang's strong development momentum is its sustained efforts in manufacturing.

Currently, Weifang has 4,142 industrial enterprises above designated size — those earning at least 20 million yuan ($2.83 million) annually. Last year, these enterprises' revenue totaled 1.1 trillion yuan, ranking second among cities in Shandong province.

Weifang has developed four industries with output value of more than 100 billion yuan including power equipment, the high-end chemical industry, food processing and new-generation information technology.

The power equipment industry's output value accounted for one-third of the national total and 176 companies in the industry have been approved as national high-tech enterprises, according to official statistics.

Of them, Weichai Holding Group, founded in 1946, is a domestically leading industrial equipment producer, with its business involving powertrain systems, commercial vehicles, agricultural equipment and intelligent logistics.

Committed to innovation, the group has set up an array of national laboratories and research institutes including the National Center of Technology Innovation for Fuel Cell.

In addition, Weichai has launched multiple intelligent manufacturing projects such as the marine equipment manufacturing center in Qingdao and a large digital industrial base in Weifang which mainly produces high-end engines.

The intelligent base, with a combined investment of 10 billion yuan, is considered a key project for Shandong province to replace old development drivers with new ones, local officials said.

Focusing on Weichai, the city government founded the Weifang Power Equipment International Cooperation Park in 2019 in a bid to improve the industry chain and attract more investment.

Companies in the park can receive customized services and benefit from a slew of supportive measures such as reduced rents, according to the operating department of the park.

As of January, the park was home to 35 enterprises including some from Germany, the ROK and Japan.

Weifang is also making efforts to cultivate emerging industries, with the aim of fostering the high-quality development of manufacturing industries and building a modern industrial system.

Established in 2001, the Weifang-headquartered company Goertek is one of the largest manufacturers of mid- and high-end virtual reality headsets in the world. Its other products include somatosensory controllers, smart watches and high-sensitivity speakers.

According to a ranking released by the Hurun Research Institute last year, Goertek ranked fourth among the top 200 Chinese enterprises with the greatest development potential in the metaverse.

Its new production base for VR intelligent hardware in Weifang Comprehensive Bonded Zone has started operations, and it is expected to generate an output value of 20 billion yuan every year.

Thanks to the VR giant, Weifang has attracted a batch of innovation-driven companies focusing on the metaverse, involving hardware production, software development and content creation, local officials said.

At the end of 2022, Weifang released a five-year (2022-26) action plan aiming to build itself into a hub of metaverse technological innovation and industry.

Weifang's metaverse industry is expected to be worth 350 billion yuan by 2026, according to the plan.

ADVERTORIAL

Starbucks riding coffee buzz in No 2 economy

By WANG ZHUOQIONG
wangzhuoqiong@chinadaily.com.cn

Leading global coffee chain Starbucks Coffee Co is on track to reach its goal of growing to 9,000 stores by 2025 in China, boosted by its continued investment in innovations related to products, digitization and supply chains in the country, said the company's top executive, amid fierce competition from local and foreign brands.

Laxman Narasimhan, CEO of Starbucks, during a recent visit to the Chinese market for the first time since he assumed his current role in March, said: "China is a very important market. Our ambitions in China are large. We expect this to be one of the largest, if not the largest market that we have in the world."

He is optimistic about the opportunities that the country's coffee sector offers, saying that "in China (the world's second-largest economy), per capita consumption (of coffee) is increasing. But yet, the headroom we have versus Japan or the US is still so large. So we have lots of opportunities to grow here".

Annual per capita coffee consumption in China stands at 12 cups, while the number in Japan is 200 and reaches 380 in the United States, according to Starbucks.

The company, which now runs over 6,200 stores in China, is meeting its goal of reaching over 9,000 stores in the country. Starbucks plans to employ over 90,000 staff in China over the next three years, from 60,000 at present.

"We're set up to grow for a long period of time here. Just the number 9,000 is only a milestone over the course of the next three years in what is going to become an even bigger market for us," said Narasimhan.

Emphasizing human connections, healthier performance and strengthening investments in digital capacities and innovations have been priorities for Starbucks, said the CEO.

Innovations on products center around the launch of new platforms for refreshers, with new ice-shaken espressos recently introduced and other food items on the menu coming onboard this summer, said the executive.

Starbucks will continue to enhance its store experiences, with designs created to appeal to a broad mix of consumers while anchoring human connections in their stores, said Narasimhan.

Digital modalities are another big area of innovation as about 47 percent of Starbucks China's transactions are carried out digitally.

Being a vertically integrated specialty coffee company in China is also a definite advantage for Starbucks, which is enhanced by a farmer support center in Pu'er, Yunnan province, with roasting facilities in Kunshan, Jiangsu province to be unveiled in September, along with many upgraded distribution centers.

Jason Yu, general manager of Kantar Worldpanel, said, "With rising coffee consumption, especially in tier-2 and tier-3 cities as well as a sizable middle-income consumer group, China will continue to be a key growth driver of Starbucks."

But Yu said the market landscape is increasingly competitive as more local players enter the sector and take market share from leading players.

"They have introduced different formats and different consumption habits for coffee," he added.

Starbucks' advantage remains in the superior experience it offers to consumers, both in their restaurants and digital interactions. However, local players are catching up fast with more innovative flavors and lower price points, Yu added.

But Yu said at present no competitor is yet able to rival Starbucks on scale as well as supply chains.

Through digital innovation, it also continues to delight consumers with new experiences so it will be a long-term battle to fight for the loyalty of coffee drinkers in China, he added.

Briefly

CNPC starts drilling ultra-deep well

China started drilling the first scientific exploration well of over 10,000 meters depth in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region on Tuesday, its operator China National Petroleum Corp said. A well between 4,500 and 6,000 meters deep is defined as a deep well, while those between 6,000 and 9,000 meters are super-deep wells, and more than 9,000 meters are categorized as ultra-deep wells. The drilling of the Take-1 well in the Tarim Basin represents a major milestone in the country's exploration of deep energy resources, the company said.

Logistics sector grows in first 4 months

China's logistics sector reported steady growth in the first four months of the year, industry data showed on Tuesday. Social logistics rose 4.4 percent year-on-year during the period to 107.6 trillion yuan ($15.19 trillion), the China Federation of Logistics and Purchasing said. Logistics for industrial products went up 3.6 percent year-on-year in the January-April period, up 0.6 percentage points from that of the first quarter.

XINHUA — CHINA DAILY

A visitor tries out a brain-computer interface during the Zhongguancun Forum in Beijing.
CHEN XIAOGEN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Brain-computer tech on march in country

China filed some 35% of global patents in related segment, leading US, Japan

By CHENG YU
chengyu@chinadaily.com.cn

Brain-computer interface technology is becoming more than a hypothetical phenomenon in China with some momentum gained in terms of research and development as well as applications, especially amid the country's latest call to support the cutting-edge sector, said government officials and industry experts during the Zhongguancun Forum that ended on Tuesday.

They made the comments after Zhao Zhiguo, chief engineer at the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, said that brain-computer interface technology will be strongly supported to be an important development direction and accelerated efforts will be made to explore more application scenarios for the technology.

"China has already formed a well-rounded industry chain including technology and applications in brain-computer interface. Related applications have already been applied in sectors like medical care, education and entertainment," Zhao said.

On Tuesday, a group of listed Chinese AI company shares soared on the brain-computer interface concept, with Innovative Medical Management Co Ltd and Jiangsu Apon Medical Technology Co Ltd surging 10 percent and 20 percent, respectively.

"China's brain-computer interface has been developing really fast. In some niche sectors, China stands at the same forefront with leading countries in the field," said Zhao Jizong, a renowned neurosurgical expert and academician at the Chinese Academy of Sciences.

Brain-computer interface is basically a technology that enables a person to control an external device using brain signals. With vanguard applications like helping people with disabilities, the technology has been a key technological battlefield for global competition.

Zhao noted that at present, the technology is mainly used in clinical trials to diagnose patients with impaired consciousness and to help patients with mobility impairments to walk.

"Although there is a certain gap with the world's most advanced technologies in brain-computer interface, the potential of the country's brain-computer interface market is huge," Zhao added.

According to a report launched by the Brain-Computer Interface Industrial Alliance on Monday, China and the United States are important birthplaces and markets for brain-computer interface technology.

China has a leading advantage in non-implantable acquisition and sensing technology of brain-computer interface. Applications for patents in the segment in China soared to 35 percent of the global total in recent years, followed by 30 percent from the US and 10 percent from Japan, the report said.

"Notably, the level of independent research and development of chips and electrodes, two critical components of brain-computer interface technology, is constantly improving in the country," said Li Wenyu, secretary of the alliance.

Tesla CEO Elon Musk's brain-implant company Neuralink said last week the US Food and Drug Administration had given the green light to its first-in-human clinical trial, right after the world's first interventional brain-computer interface experiment in nonhuman primates, led by China's Nankai University Professor Duan Feng's team, was successfully completed earlier this month.

Market research company Strategic Market Research also pointed out that the brain-computer interface market will reach $5.34 billion by 2030 in terms of market value.

As brain-computer interface technology gradually develops, He Jianghong, a renowned expert of neurosurgery at Beijing Tiantan Hospital, pointed out that safety problems should be given special attention during the technology's development.

"Attention should be paid to track whether the device can be safely put in and become compatible for a long time, and whether it will cause direct damage such as infections, bleeding or other problems for users," said He.

"Also, once this technology is widely applied, it will inevitably collect data like a large number of human brain signals, thus involving problems in privacy," he added.

Thus, it is necessary for China and other countries to put ethical issues at the forefront and take precautions so that the brain-computer interface industry can develop in a healthy way in the years to come, he added.

EDF eyes further market expansion

By ZHENG XIN
zhengxin@chinadaily.com.cn

Electricite de France will further invest in China to strengthen its presence in the country as the Chinese government has been making greater efforts to attract foreign capital and widen market access, said a top company executive.

"We are committed to consolidate our presence in nuclear power, solar, onshore and offshore wind power, as well as energy services in the country," said Fabrice Fourcade, EDF China chairman, in an interview in Beijing recently.

"We welcome China's efforts to widen market access and promote further opening-up of modern service industries. EDF has been and will continue to aid the country's transition to a low-carbon economy, and we will continue working with local partners and develop a long-term strategic partnership in China," Fourcade said.

He made the remarks during the EDF Pulse Awards China held in Beijing in May — an award that helps Chinese startups use new technology solutions to make electric power generation more ecologically friendly and better connected.

Fourcade said that with innovation at the core of all its work, EDF has diversified its business in China in recent years into low-carbon energy services, including low-carbon heating and cooling networks, EV charging solutions, renewable energy and engineering consultant services.

As one of the largest foreign investors in China's power generation sector, holding nuclear, thermal and renewables assets in China with a net installed capacity of 3,408 megawatts, EDF is committed to providing innovative solutions and technologies under China's double carbon targets, he said.

EDF became the first foreign investor in Chinese nuclear power projects in 2009 via participation in the Taishan European Pressurized Water Reactor (EPR) nuclear power plant, which is led by Taishan Nuclear Power Joint Venture Co, a company founded by State-owned China General Nuclear Power Group (51 percent), EDF (30 percent) and Guangdong Energy Group (19 percent). It is the largest cooperation project to have been signed between China and France in the energy sector.

Taishan's two reactors are capable of supplying the Chinese power grid with up to 24 terawatt-hours of carbon dioxide-free electricity each year, EDF said.

Lin Boqiang, head of the China Institute for Studies in Energy Policy at Xiamen University, said China's energy transition has brought numerous opportunities to multinational corporations like EDF.

International firms have also been stepping up efforts to align their core business activities with market demand in China, he said.

Among the first batch of foreign companies to enter China to help the country develop its nuclear energy infrastructure, EDF believes there is space for further cooperation with Chinese partners in the sector, even though China is among the world's leaders in nuclear technologies.

Du Wenhui, EDF R&D China center director, said technology research and innovation have long been playing a key role in China's pledge to reduce carbon emissions.

EDF will further strengthen its cooperation and relations with innovative Chinese companies to jointly bring more projects to operational stages in China as well as in Europe, Du said.

Zeiss Group mulls greater investment in Chinese mainland

By ZHU WENQIAN
zhuwenqian@chinadaily.com.cn

Zeiss Group is looking to increase investments in China, the German optical systems and optoelectronics manufacturer said, spurred by growth opportunities stemming from an aging population with vision problems.

The company has stepped up efforts to localize its business in the country, and the launch of various products and solutions related to presbyopia — the gradual inability to see nearby objects with age — and cataracts reflects such a strategy.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Zeiss said it noticed people spending much longer hours on their electronic devices such as mobile phones. This has significantly affected eye health in various groups of people, leading to a high demand for post-pandemic eye health diagnosis and treatments, it said.

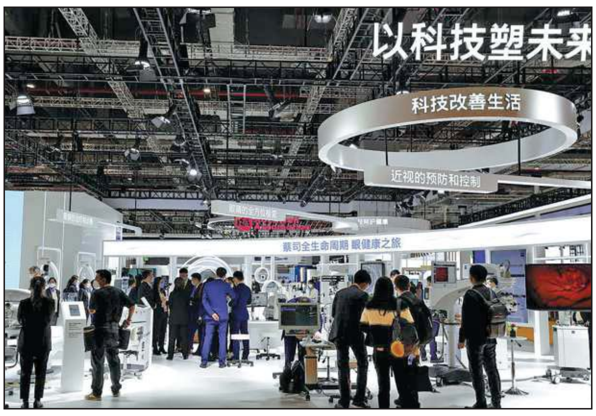
The 177-year-old enterprise, which offers lifetime eye healthcare management, said it has been attracted by the maturity of the Chinese market, particularly the research and development capability in China.

Zeiss said China is becoming an extremely attractive market, and the company is seeing more business opportunities to cooperate with local companies.

"In the last few years, localization has been an important new component of the development of Zeiss in China. When we get to real localization, it is innovation out of China," said Maximilian Foerst, head of Zeiss China. "There's a very active startup scene, and we are cooperating with more established companies and doing joint innovation in many different areas."

Foerst said the company is continuing to strengthen its "manufacturing footprint" in the country.

"We have seen China moving from a market where we sold products first, then developing into a market where we also manufacture products. We have a substantial manufacturing footprint in China, both in the Yangtze River Delta and in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area in southern China," he said.



A view of the booth of Zeiss Group during an expo in Shanghai.
ZHANG WEI / CHINA DAILY

Zeiss recently supported the Senior University of China in holding a series of science popularization activities about eye health, and invited medical experts for seminars and complimentary eye screenings for the elderly across 10 cities.

China has a population of 264 million people aged 60 and above, according to the latest national census taken in 2021. It is estimated that more than 200 million seniors have been experiencing presbyopia and cataracts, industry insiders said.

Among the elderly aged between 60 and 89, the incidence of getting cataracts is about 80 percent in China, and people may begin to show symptoms of presbyopia from the age of 38, according to the Chinese Ophthalmological Society.

With improvements in living standards and increasingly diverse lifestyles, the elderly have shown a growing proclivity toward using intelligent devices, watching screens, painting and photography, and these require good vision.

"The elderly group has shown a significantly higher demand for good vision quality, but many people have insufficient understanding about eye diseases and treatment methods," said Song Xudong, director of the cataract department at Beijing Tongren Hospital.

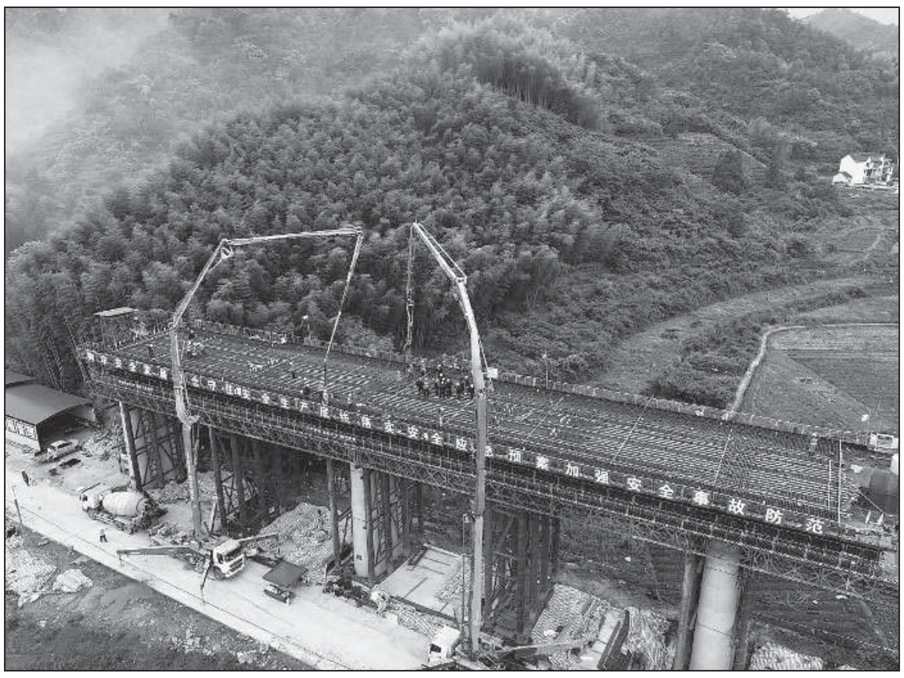
"Thanks to the development of intraocular lens, eye issues such as myopia, hyperopia, presbyopia and cataracts can be properly solved by surgical operations. Currently, there is no effective medication to treat or delay the onset of cataracts," Song said.

BUSINESS

Builders ramp up infra push

Local special bond issuances inject liquidity, boosting projects for early completion

By ZHUANG QIANGE
zhuangqiange@chinadaily.com.cn



Employees of China Railway 24th Bureau Group Corp Ltd work on a rail bridge project on the Jinhua-Jiande High-speed Railway in Zhejiang province last week. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

The nation's massive infrastructure aspirations show no sign of slowing, as State-owned builders are accelerating major projects nationwide, which experts attribute to the increasingly abundant liquidity injected into the sector this year.

On the Jinhua-Jiande High-speed Railway in Zhejiang province, builders of China Railway 24th Bureau Group Corp Ltd (CR24), a unit of China Railway Construction Corp, recently finished a section of the concrete casting of a continuous beam for a rail bridge above Yuwu Creek.

The continuous beam was cast in three sections. The completed section, with a total length of 71.1 meters and a casting volume of 764 cubic meters, was finished last week using the bracket casting method.

Due to the large casting volume and high technical challenges, CR24 said its team organized supervision and operation teams to ensure construction quality, with a clear division of labor and responsibility.

When the concrete pouring began, standardized operations were strictly implemented, safety and quality control were strengthened, and key links such as tamping and compaction were closely monitored, CR24 said.

The successful pouring of the first section of the continuous beam marks a key milestone achieved faster than expected. The project department has made faster steps supported by ample labor and funding resources since the beginning of this year and is confident in completing its task objectives early, said Xu Yimeng, an employee with CR24's project team.

With a designed speed of 250 kilometers per hour, the high-speed railway is a locally built project to link Zhejiang's Jinhua, Lanxi and Jiande with China's major railway network, and aims to provide faster rail service for passengers traveling between Zhejiang and inland provinces.

Additionally, at the construction site of a shantytown renovation project in Shanghai, CR24 employees are readying materials for the upcoming construction of residential building frameworks.

According to the blueprints, the State contractor is supposed to deliver residential buildings for more than 2,100 households by the end of September 2024.

One of the earliest groups of modern communities rose in the 1950s — Pengyi Community — once a "community of glory" as it was home to various industries' role models in Shanghai, now awaits renovation as many of the infrastructure facilities serving it are in disrepair.

"Construction of the project stopped last year due to COVID-19. This year, holding the principle of building a high-quality project, the team has gone the whole hog to push forward progress to achieve as early a finish as possible," said Zhao Feng, project manager with CR24.

Listed as a key livelihood project in Shanghai, the renovation project has a total building area of 210,785 square meters and will have four facilities supporting residents' daily needs, including an elder care institute, which the project manager said aims to better serve the 585 households with senior residents aged above 80.

"We completed all of the underground construction work last week. The construction pace has gained obvious traction this year. We are confident we will accomplish the completion in time," the manager said.

Referring to the intensified and faster layout of infrastructure projects, experts said that ample funding is one of the main drivers to this end, especially with local government bonds playing a major role.

According to ChinaBond, as of May 23, the scale of new local bond issuances exceeded 2 trillion yuan ($282 billion), completing nearly 80 percent of the quota approved in advance. According to a report from China Futures, more than 60 percent of the funds target infrastructure construction.

"The issuance of special bonds will accelerate further in the future, and it is expected that the annual issuance task of 3.8 trillion yuan will be completed in the third quarter," said Luo Zhiheng, chief economist at Yuekai Securities.

"Infrastructure investment centered on major projects will continue to grow rapidly in the second quarter. For the whole year, new infrastructure investment may moderately exceed expectations and become a key point for stable investment," Luo said.

Chinese investments help bolster Thai biz

BANGKOK — Increasing Chinese investments into Thailand, highlighted by the electric vehicle industry, have brought relevant industrial chains and technologies, helping to boost the Thai economy and green development in recent years, said the head of the country's East Economy Corridor.

As a major vehicle production and export base in Southeast Asia, Thailand has attracted growing numbers of Chinese electric vehicle manufacturers over the years, echoing the Thai government's incentives for the EV industry, Chula Sukmanop, secretary-general of the EEC policy committee, said during an interview with Xinhua News Agency in Bangkok.

"Many Chinese companies have invested in Thailand. Some are coming to meet the demands of the domestic market in Thailand and export to neighboring countries. Thailand is expected to export more and more EVs in the future," Chula said.

According to the automobile society of Thailand, Chinese brands accounted for about 90 percent of Thailand's EV market in 2021.

Chinese EV makers like MG and Great Wall have set up their factories in the EEC. China's biggest EV manufacturer BYD and EV startup Neta Auto are also setting foot in Thailand.

The Thai government wants electric vehicle production to reach about 30 percent of total auto manufacturing by 2030. Surveys show that the EV sales volume in Thailand surged to nearly 10,000 units in 2022 from less than 2,000 units in 2021. The sales volume is expected to double in 2023.

Chula said Chinese EV companies have attracted related enterprises in the automobile industrial chain, including auto parts, tires, batteries and charging stations. It not only creates employment locally, but also brings technology and talent training, contributing to the improvement of Thailand's labor force quality.

The EEC, which covers three coastal provinces — namely Rayong, Chonburi and Chachoengsao — east of the capital Bangkok, is a centerpiece of government efforts to boost growth and encourage investment, particularly in high-tech industries.

> "Thailand and China share strong ties, not only in investment but also people-to-people exchanges."
>
> **Chula Sukmanop,** secretary-general of the East Economy Corridor policy committee

The project focuses on upgrading infrastructure and implementing a series of investment incentives to attract high-value-added industries, as it transitions from those reliant on cheap labor.

Currently, industries such as petrochemicals, automotive and auto parts, electronics and appliances have the highest investment share in the region.

From 2018 to the first quarter of this year, investment from China has accounted for more than 10 percent of foreign investment into the EEC. China has become one of the major investors, according to the secretary-general.

He said China contributes a lot to the economic growth of Thailand. In addition to industrial cooperation and foreign direct investment, Chinese tourists play a significant role in driving the growth of Thailand's tourism as one of the largest source markets.

"Thailand and China share strong ties, not only in investment but also people-to-people exchanges. We had seen some drops in trade activity during the pandemic. But with these ties, I think it's going to recover very soon," he said.

XINHUA

Visa applications rise on release of pent-up demand

By FAN FEIFEI
fanfeifei@chinadaily.com.cn

Chinese visa applications have witnessed a strong rebound this year, driven by pent-up travel demand after the reopening of international borders and removal of quarantine requirements early this year, according to VFS Global, the world's leading visa application outsourcing and technology service provider.

Data from VFS Global show that the overall visa application volume from China reached 35 percent of the pre-pandemic levels by the end of May. Top destinations for visa applications from Chinese tourists include Canada, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom and the United States. Japan, South Korea and Thailand are also popular destinations.

"China is one of our biggest and most important customer source markets. By the end of May, we restarted 80 percent of visa application centers in China in response to Chinese tourists' pent-up demand," said Kishen Singh, chief operating officer of the Chinese mainland, Hong Kong and Mongolia at VFS Global.

Singh said the bookings for visa appointments surged since March, adding he is bullish on the prospects of the robust recovery of outbound trips this year. He also estimated the volume of visa applications from China is projected to reach 70 to 80 percent of pre-pandemic levels in 2024.

Given the strong travel demand this year, Singh suggests that all applicants apply for their visas well in advance to avoid visa processing delays during the peak season. Moreover, the demand for personalized visa application services such as "visa at your doorstep" increased by 40 percent compared with 2019.

At present, VFS Global has over 400 visa application centers across 16 cities in China, catering to visa application facilitation for 35 government clients. The company has processed over 261 million applications since its inception in 2001.

According to a recent survey from market consultancy McKinsey, pent-up demand for outbound travel from the Chinese mainland is massive, with 40 percent of surveyed respondents wanting to travel and prioritizing international destinations for their next trip.

The World Tourism Organization forecasts that international arrivals will likely reach 80 percent to 95 percent of the pre-pandemic levels in 2023, compared with 63 percent in 2022, despite lingering global headwinds.

According to data from Ctrip, China's leading online tourism agency, the countries with the largest volume of visa applications in April were Singapore, Japan, Malaysia, Thailand and South Korea.

In addition, the number of outbound ticket searches grew significantly in the past few days, with departure times concentrated before the Dragon Boat Festival, for popular destinations such as Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur and Singapore, Ctrip said.

Chinese people's urgent demand for outbound travel is also pushing tourism authorities to adjust their policies. On Jan 20, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism released a circular to revive outbound group travel to 20 countries with friendly entry policies toward China, including Thailand, the Maldives, the United Arab Emirates, Russia and New Zealand.

The global travel industry will get a strong boost as China resumed quarantine-free cross-border travel on Jan 8 after nearly three years since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, experts said.

Dai Bin, president of the China Tourism Academy, said China's outbound trip segment is expected to see a robust recovery this year, which will inject strong impetus into the prosperity of the country's tourism industry. He added that Chinese travelers' enthusiasm for outbound trips, which has been suppressed for three years, has unleashed a surge in visa applications.

Sci-tech class is on

Yang Qingquan, a staffer from the Hefei Institutes of Physical Science under the Chinese Academy of Sciences, introduces EAST, or the experimental and advanced superconducting tokamak, in the institutes located in Anhui province. Tokamak is a device used in nuclear-fusion research for magnetic confinement of plasma. In pursuing high-quality development, Anhui is utilizing the 12 Hefei-based national science platforms to boost innovations in a bid to make the provincial capital Hefei into a scientific and technology innovation hub. FAN ZIHAO / CHINA DAILY

Nation speeds up AI thrust to spur real economy

While walking into the 2023 Zhongguancun Forum exhibition, visitors have encountered various robots providing services such as delivery, reception, guidance, and information inquiry.

The rich application scenarios of artificial intelligence technology created by Chinese enterprises have come under the spotlight at the exhibition, mirroring the country's efforts in accelerating AI applications to power and upgrade the real economy.

At the booth of Changmugu, a Beijing-based medical enterprise focusing on orthopedic AI and surgical robot solutions, a surgical robotic arm attracted a continuous stream of visitors.

"Before surgery, doctors will have 3D images of bones through AI technology and calculate the most suitable surgical plan for patients through big data. The robotic arm will conduct the operation with the help of a surgical navigation system," Zhang Yiling, chairman of the company, said about its orthopedic surgery diagnosis and treatment system.

The system can help reduce the difficulty, shorten the time, and improve the accuracy of operations, as well as reduce postoperative complications, said Zhang.

"With AI technology, the 3D printing model truly restores the structure of cerebral blood vessels, which is very useful in medical research and teaching," said Zhang Peng, the product manager of UnionStrong (Beijing) Technology Co Ltd. "Our 3D printing model of intracranial vascular equipped with a surgical simulator helps doctors conduct preoperative exercises and postoperative simulations."

According to the manager, the company's product line now covers the prevention, screening, diagnosis, treatment, and rehabilitation of cerebrovascular diseases. It has cooperated with many hospitals nationwide to optimize the application of AI products in clinical diagnosis and treatment.

"China has already entered the ranks of the world's leading medical AI research countries. Chinese companies and medical institutions are actively promoting more AI-enabled medical treatment methods and models," he added.

The innovations in the medical sector reflect China's efforts in promoting deep integration of AI with the real economy.

In a move to accelerate AI applications and foster a new growth point of the national economy, China released in August 2022 a document pledging support to AI applications in 10 application scenarios including farming, mining, autonomous driving, and medical services.

Thanks to these supportive policies, China has emerged as a pioneer in AI development in recent years. By 2022, China had secured the top position globally in terms of the number of patent applications filed for AI technologies, with the scale of the core AI industry surpassing 500 billion yuan ($70.66 billion), while more than 4,200 major enterprises operated, comprising about 16 percent of the global total.

Since 2020, China has entered a rapid development period for large AI models. Currently, the total number of published large AI models in China and the United States accounts for more than 80 percent of the global total, said Zhao Zhiyun, director of the Institute of Scientific and Technical Information of China.

"AI has become the focus of human innovation, and the era of AI with large models as the core has led technological innovation," said Robin Li, board chair and CEO of Baidu. "AI applications based on large models can serve transportation, energy, and other fields in the real economy."

"While we have brought a proliferation of large AI models, we should accelerate their application in different industries of the real economy," said Zhou Ming, former vice-president of Microsoft Research Asia.

China's advantage in AI development lies in its rich application scenarios created during the intelligent upgrading of the real economy. Zhou said AI technology should combine with application scenarios to play its most optimal role.

The 2023 Zhongguancun Forum from May 25 to 30 has drawn top scientists, institutions, and well-known innovation and entrepreneurship entities globally to discuss international cooperation in sci-tech development and innovation.

As a sideline event, the exhibition has attracted the participation of about 650 enterprises and institutions worldwide to showcase their cutting-edge sci-tech advances and achievements in information technology, intelligent manufacturing, medicine and health, and the digital economy.

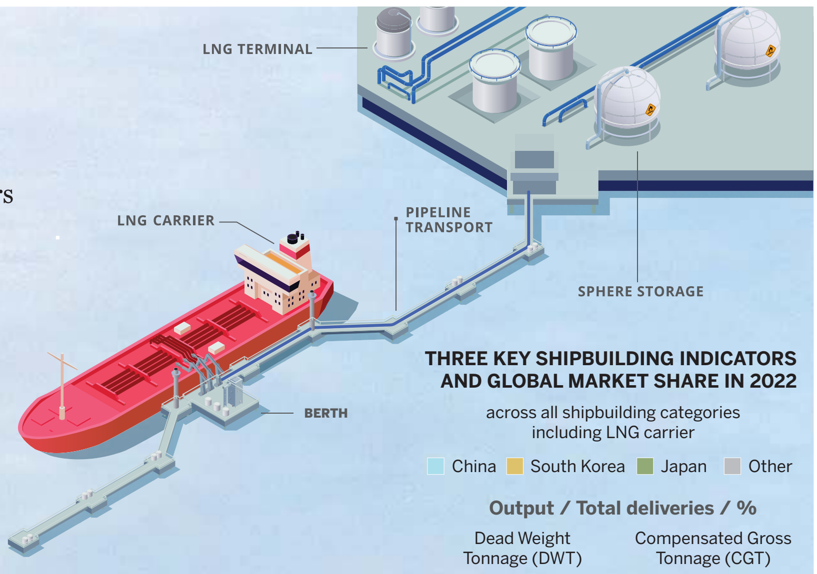
XINHUA

CHINA MARVELS

Editor's Note: *This new series in China Daily celebrates various technologies, industries, infrastructure and capital goods projects for being the world's most impressive in their class. They are also a testament to the tremendous progress China has made in recent decades on the back of its reform and opening-up policy, as well as the nation's drive for high-quality development and a modern industrial system.*

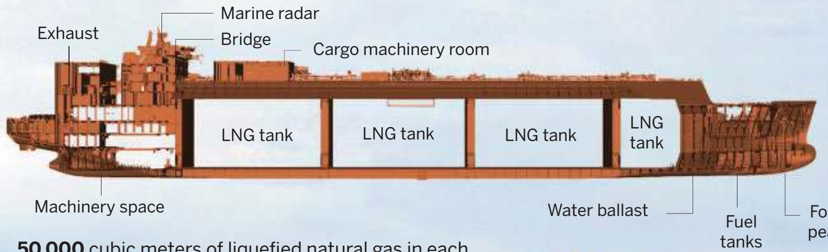
'Floating pipelines'

China became a major powerhouse in building LNG (liquefied natural gas) carriers after it received orders for 55 vessels — more than 30 percent of the world's total — in 2022. The LNG carrier market was previously dominated by Japanese and South Korean shipbuilders as Chinese shipyards were not capable of building such vessels before 2008, when the first China-made LNG ship was delivered.



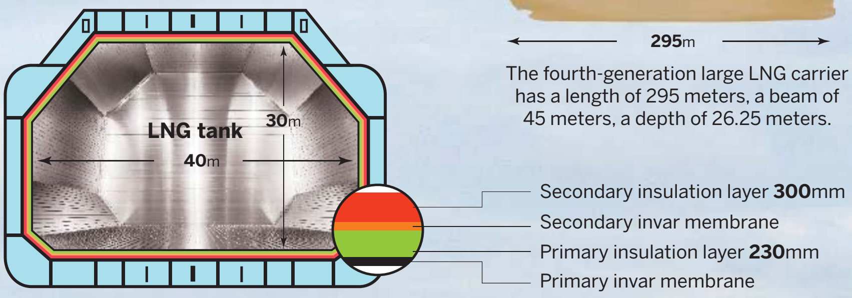
THE FOURTH-GENERATION LARGE LNG CARRIER

has a service speed of 19.5 knots and utilizes the latest dual-fuel low-speed propulsion system, resulting in a fuel consumption of less than 100 metric tons per day.



50,000 cubic meters of liquefied natural gas in each of the three large liquefied cargo tanks in the carrier

The fourth-generation large LNG carrier has a length of 295 meters, a beam of 45 meters, a depth of 26.25 meters.

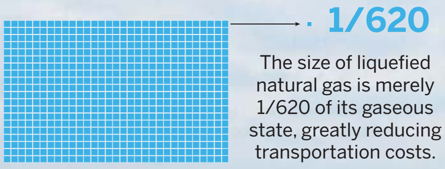


The fifth-generation large LNG carrier, which is now under construction, moves faster, weighs lighter, consumes less fuel, carries more cargo and has better performance in low temperature conditions.

WHAT IS AN LNG CARRIER?

Along with aircraft carriers and luxury cruise ships, LNG carriers are regarded as the most difficult vessels to build in shipbuilding industry. An LNG carrier is a tank ship designed for transporting liquefied natural gas (LNG).

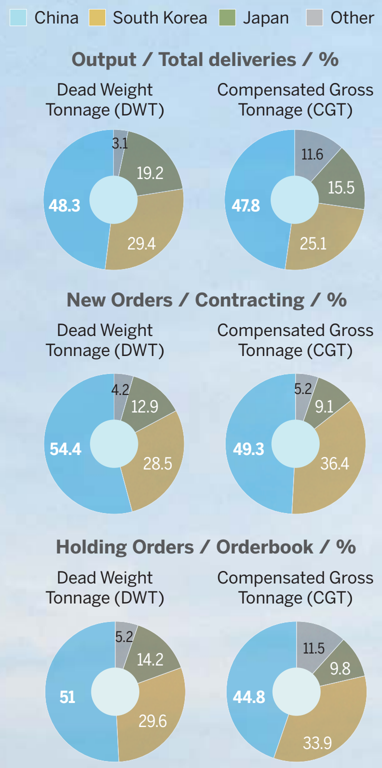
Due to the special characteristics of natural gas, shipping the energy in a liquefied state, or at the temperature of below -163 C, is the most cost-efficient.



The size of liquefied natural gas is merely 1/620 of its gaseous state, greatly reducing transportation costs.

THREE KEY SHIPBUILDING INDICATORS AND GLOBAL MARKET SHARE IN 2022

across all shipbuilding categories including LNG carrier



FACTS AND FIGURES ABOUT 174,000-CUBIC-METER LNG CARRIER

more than **1.1 million** number of components and parts

60,000 number of insulating boxes

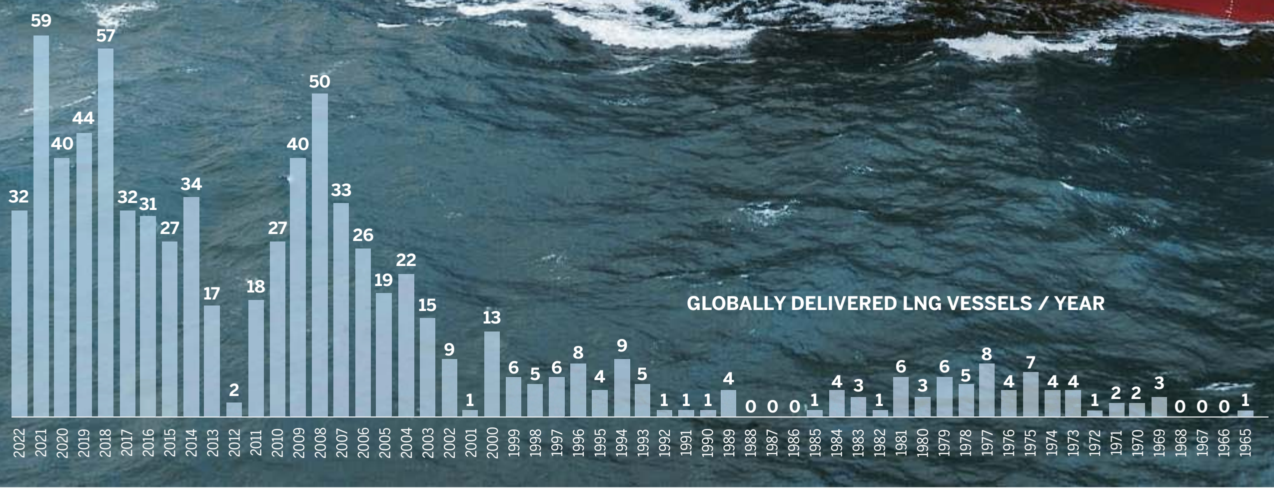
480 tons weight of 0.7 mm-thick nickel–iron alloy called 'invar'

150 kilometers the total length of the weld for the invar sheet

more than **1 billion yuan** cost of building the carrier equivalent to building two Boeing 737 aircraft

108 million cubic meters of natural gas equal to 174,000 cubic meters of LNG after gasifying

16 days number of days the gas held by the carrier can be used for daily consumption of all residents in Beijing



Online
See more by scanning the code.

SOURCES: HUDONG-ZHONGHUA AND CLARKSONS RESEARCH; TEXT BY WANG YING / CHINA DAILY; GRAPHICS BY TIAN CHI / CHINA DAILY

TIMELINE OF LNG CARRIER CONSTRUCTION

1998
In response to the central government's call for made-in-China vessels, China State Shipbuilding Corp Ltd's Shanghai-based subsidiary Hudong-Zhonghua Shipbuilding (Group) Co Ltd, launches its LNG carrier project which features patented technology for liquefied cargo containment system from Gaztransport & Technigaz (GTT) of France.

2001
After seven months of research and development, Hudong-Zhonghua successfully builds a prototype for the No 96 cargo containment system, which is certified by GTT and classification societies in the UK, US, France, Norway, and Japan.

March 2002
Hudong-Zhonghua wins a bid to construct two 147,000-cubic-meter LNG carriers.

December 15, 2004
The construction of China's first domestically-built LNG carrier kicks off at Hudong-Zhonghua.

April 3, 2008

Dapeng Sun, China's first self-built LNG carrier, is delivered to its owner by Hudong-Zhonghua, ending the domination of Japanese and South Korean shipyards in building LNG carriers.

2008 to 2021
Hudong-Zhonghua develops five generations of LNG carriers, the Changqing series (2004), the Changjian series (2010), the Chang'an series (2012), the Changxing series (2017). On December

16, 2021, Hudong-Zhonghua unveils the fifth generation 174,000-cubic-meter LNG vessel from its Changheng series, and receives orders of building 37 vessels in 2022. The Shanghai-based

shipyard has so far delivered more than 40 LNG vessels.

March 2022
Jiangnan Shipyard (Group) Co Ltd and Dalian Shipbuilding Industry Co Ltd receive their first large scale LNG carrier orders. This marks each company's foray into the LNG vessel construction industry.

2022
China State Shipbuilding Corp (CSSC) receives orders for 49 units of the new LNG carrier. The new orders catapult China State Shipbuilding Corp's global market share from less than 7 percent in 2021 to about 30 percent in 2022.

Z WEEKLY

All about Gen Z

Z WEEKLY

A message from the editor

Greetings to you all.

You might have noticed that the header of the following three pages has changed from "Youth" to "Z Weekly", with "Z" referring to "Generation Z" — those born between 1995 and 2009.

That's right. From now on, these pages will be dedicated to Gen Zers both in China and abroad. They will be a place for Generation Z to tell their stories, share their passions, and voice their opinions.

We will strive to reflect the vitality of youth, presented in its myriad shapes and colors, as reflected in culture — including art, music, film and fashion — and embodied in the personalities who populate those fields.

We're looking to break down barriers between Generation Z and the other generations by introducing Gen Zers' likes and dislikes, how they view the world and how they make life choices. We're also looking to incorporate print and online media by offering videos with articles and regularly holding offline get-togethers and roundtable talks so readers can meet in person and exchange ideas.

So to put it simply, as long as you find something you like to read in here every week, even the slightest spark of interest, we'll consider our mission completed.

We welcome feedback of all kinds, including story ideas, which you can send directly to the editor at zw@chinadaily.com.cn.

We very much look forward to hearing from you.

Young speakers from China, Iran, Russia and Belarus shared their stories and perspectives at Youth Voices from the Belt and Road forum 2023, held on May 21 at Tsinghua University in Beijing. PHOTO PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

More commonalities than differences

World's youth build bridges of communication as part of the Belt and Road Initiative.

By GUI QIAN
guiqian@i21st.cn

The participation of young people has become a vital force for Belt and Road cooperation, Wang Hao, deputy editor-in-chief of China Daily, said in his opening remarks at Youth Voices from the Belt and Road forum 2023, held on May 21 at Tsinghua University in Beijing.

Co-sponsored by China Daily and Tsinghua, the forum followed the China-Central Asia Summit, held from May 18 to May 19 in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, which sought to deepen friendships between China and countries along the Belt and Road and promote the building of a community with a shared future for mankind, according to Wang.

This year marks the 10th anniversary since Chinese President Xi Jinping first proposed the Belt and Road Initiative. The Report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China noted, "the Belt and Road Initiative has been welcomed by the international community as a platform for cooperation as well as public goods". To give full play to the exemplary role of young people involved in Belt and Road cooperation, Wang urges three points: the importance of quality education, that genuine knowledge comes from practice, and communication platforms are key.

Martha A. Mavrommatis, Cyprus' ambassador to China, also stressed the strength of youth in her speech at the forum, calling young people "the future of both countries and of the world". She also used the Chinese proverb "a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step" to compare the positive changes that the Belt and Road Initiative has brought.

"We are all eager to hear how this great initiative has transformed for the better the lives of young people like yourselves, not only in China but also worldwide," said ambassador Mavrommatis.

At the forum, six young guest speakers from China, Iran, Russia and Belarus shared their stories and perspectives. They talked about visiting and living in different countries, the role of youth in international communication, and the responsibilities that their generation is shouldering in Belt and Road cooperation.

Yulia Temelidi from Russia, a student ambassador for global communication at Tsinghua University, shared her experience of participating in China Daily's video program *Youth Power*, where young people from across the world discuss global issues, including education and economy. She found that their discussion sparked the interest of viewers and promoted a common understanding of some key global topics.

"When I read the viewers' comments, I came to realize the meaning of holding such youth activities," said Temelidi. "We young people are the power of the future. We accumulate knowledge through communication and prepare to create a better world."

Ekaterina Kaligaeva is the champion of the Belarus Division of Chinese Bridge (a Chinese proficiency competition for foreign students), a Journalism and Communication graduate of Tsinghua University, and now a vlogger. With rich experience in cross-cultural communication, she shared methods for promoting Chinese culture to the world.

"To better introduce China to friends from other parts of the world, storytelling from the first person point of view matters," she said. "The public prefer personal experiences and observations rather than official, long and complicated content."

She took the work of vloggers as an example, saying that if they were going to make a video to introduce Shandong province, they'd better talk about the food and daily life there, like the Zibo barbecue, which has been trending on Chinese social media. "Although we young people are not diplomats or spokespeople from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, we can still bring the people of two countries closer in our own ways and help them realize that we have more commonalities than differences," she said.

Tao Tianye, a Chinese student at Tsinghua University who led a research team to Saudi Arabia, shared her stories of making friends with local people and her thoughts on international communication. Tao remembered she used to worry about the language barrier between her and the Saudi Arabians she met, as they didn't speak each other's language, and neither she nor they were fluent in English. But when a local person said to her, "Let's play ping-pong", all her worries and hesitations disappeared, and they became instant friends.

"Everything can be your 'language': sports, music… A Saudi Arabian once told me, 'you guys need to promote your country and talk about your country'. Yes, language is important, but not as important as the will to communicate cross-culturally," Tao said.

The young speakers' speeches echoed the words of Xiang Botao, deputy secretary of the CPC Tsinghua University Committee. Xiang said during the forum's opening remarks: "Youth across the world share common aspirations and commitments, which contributes to the progress and development of mankind."

"I hope our young friends from countries along the Belt and Road can give full play to their passion, sincerity, wisdom and strength," said Xiang.

SOCIAL MEDIA DIGEST

Sun shines with AI

Singaporean singer Stefanie Sun is trending once again in China, not for a fresh album or gig, but for her AI-cloned singing voice.

A cascade of music videos on Bilibili.com, a popular platform among Gen Z, features an AI-version of Sun's voice, generating quite a buzz. Among them, a digitally manipulated version of *Hair Like Snow* that replaces Jay Chou's original voice with Sun's, has garnered 1.7 million views since mid-April. These AI-generated renditions have left fans astounded, unable to distinguish Sun's real voice from its AI-generated counterpart.

While AI developments like ChatGPT are revolutionizing the tech scene, they're also raising concerns about potential copyright infringements, causing a stir in many industries.

However, artists like Canadian singer Grimes and Chinese rapper Jfever are embracing the AI trend. Grimes has invited creators to use AI to mimic her voice, promising to share any royalties generated. Jfever views voice cloning as a way to develop new partnerships and advocates for AI-driven collaboration.

Stefanie Sun PHOTO PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Tears spark joy

"My working day is over, bye!" This is not a casual farewell to colleagues but a tweet from an ardent fan of *The Legend of Zelda*, who is ready to dive into the newest game, *Tears of the Kingdom*.

This sequel to the critically acclaimed *Breath of the Wild* sent fans into an online frenzy, hitting the No 1 spot on Twitter's trending topics on May 11 and still ranking third on May 12.

The game, combining its open-world exploration, innovative gameplay, and stunning visuals, has earned praise and perfect scores from well-known gaming media, including IGN, GameSpot, and VGC.

IGN extolled it as an "unfathomable follow-up", surpassing its predecessor in virtually every aspect — from quality of life improvements to a genuinely riveting storyline, as well as inventive building mechanics.

With this buzz, it's clear that *The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom* is not just a game but a cultural phenomenon engaging a new generation of gamers.

The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom PHOTO PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Contact the writer at xuwanyang@i21st.cn

Z WEEKLY

The sport of the digital generation

Play to be fast and furious

By PATRICK MCCARTHY
patrickmccarthy@i21st.cn

In many traditional esports games, players compete online at the same time. But the single-player game speedrun is another exciting aspect of the world of competitive video games with its own interesting history. To put it simply: speedrunning is the act of playing a video game, or a section of a video game, as quickly as possible. Yet the exact methods for completing a speedrun can vary wildly, depending on the type of speedrun the player is doing.

If we use the original *Super Mario Bros.* game as an example, the aim is to complete the game as fast as possible. However, in many games, there are bugs, or glitches, which can allow players to skip ahead levels to reach the end quicker. This means we can divide speedrunning into two simple categories: speedrunning which uses these glitches, and glitchless speedrunning which involves playing the game as the game creator intended.

Some speedruns can also be assisted with tools. Players can use software and tools to advance the game frame-by-frame and record a series of controller inputs helping reveal certain strategies and glitches.

For most speedrunning entertainers, using glitches is a popular tactic to save more time. For example, most players spend about two hours finishing the game *Super Mario Bros.*, but while using glitches, it can be shortened to about five minutes.

Apart from glitches, beating a game fast sometimes can involve out-of-the-box thinking or techniques that still operate within the "rules" of the game. One popular example of this is "bunny hopping", usually performed by jumping and crouching at the same time to get some extra momentum.

Another feature that attracts many speedrun game players is its community-based nature. Major marathon competitions like *Games Done Quick* in the United States and the *European Speedrunner Assembly* in Sweden are held each year along with continuously updated online leaderboards and forums. These all help to bring a sense of community to the speedrunning scene as players seek to both break records and work together to find new and unexplored speedrunning techniques in games.

A poster for the 2023 animated movie *Super Mario Bros.* PHOTO PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Esports aiming for gold

Esports' popularity could one day see it shine on the Olympic stage.

Team EDward Gaming (left) and team DAMWON KIA compete in the League of Legends World Championship Final on Nov 6, 2021 in Reykjavik, Iceland.
PHOTO PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

By DAVID HOUSE
davidhouse@i21st.cn

As esports gets more recognition and has successfully made its way into the Asian Games, there's been expectation that it would feature at the Olympic Games. However, we might need to wait for that. Esports will not be at the Paris 2024 Olympics. There is still the question of if games that include violence and weapons should be allowed to be at the Olympics.

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) president, Thomas Bach, talked about esports at an appearance at the 2018 Asian Games, "We cannot have in the Olympic program a game … promoting violence [and] so-called 'killer games'. They … are contradictory to the Olympic values and cannot … be accepted," reported the Independent.

However, the competitive nature of gaming, the skills, reflexes and dedication as well as the team spirit needed to succeed in the competitive industry are all reasons that make esports an increasingly reputable form of competition, one that both professionals and amateurs can take part in and achieve their ambitions.

Double Olympics pole vault champion Yelena Isinbayeva recognizes the physical efforts of professional gamers. She said to Olympic news website Inside the Games: "… training can be eight hours a day, like a normal athlete, because they have to be physically prepared to sit for eight hours and more in front of the computer to play the game." She added, "Of course, they train their concentration, they train their mental health because only strong athletes can participate."

Some believe that esports might just be what the Olympics needs right now. As the Financial Times notes, "for the Olympics, which suffers from falling TV ratings and an aging viewership, esports can bring in a significant young audience."

That might be why the IOC, while not recognizing esports as part of the major Olympics yet, has provided it its own Olympics event. The inaugural Olympic Esports Series (OES) started on March 1. Professional and amateur players from around the world were invited to take part in qualifying rounds of virtual games.

But instead of featuring some of the most popular multiplayer online battle arena (MOBA) games, the OES includes virtual versions of archery, baseball, cycling, chess, dance, taekwondo, sailing, motor sports and tennis. The in-person finals will be held at the first ever Olympic Esports Week from June 22 to 25 in Singapore, according to the Olympics official website.

"The first Olympic Esports Week marks an important milestone in our ambition to support the growth of virtual sports within the Olympic Movement," said IOC president Bach.

Chinese League of Legends gamer works hard to stay on top

By XU ZHAOLIN
xuzhaolin@i21st.cn

"I wanted to be known by more people when I chose this career path," said Bai Jiahao, also known as 369, an esports player for JD Gaming in China.

Thanks to his gaming skills and passion, the 22-year-old was selected to be a professional League of Legends (LOL) player six years ago. He is now ranked as one of the five best LOL top laners of 2022 by game site Inven Global.

With his studies falling behind in junior high school, Bai decided to attend a vocational school to at least "learn a skill". By then, he was good at playing LOL and was even paid to play the game for others.

"I had felt inferior to others, but the game gave me confidence," Bai said. "So I went to a training team for teenagers. I wished to be seen."

Bai Jiahao PHOTO PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

However, the first two training teams he attended didn't do well. Bai felt that he wasn't fully inspired. In the third team, Bai set goals and was more strict with himself. Luckily, his family were very supportive too. "My grandma supported my decision the most and told me to take care of myself and be happy no matter what," Bai said.

Training takes up almost all of his time. "We usually get up at 1 pm in the afternoon, and the training ends at 3 to 4 am the next morning," Bai said. There are usually more players online in the evening and at night, which provides esports players with a better gaming environment for training.

During the competition season, players won't have days off. "This is because the matches are intensive too," Bai said. They may have longer vacations after a season.

Apart from being good at playing the game, in Bai's mind, the most important requirement for esports players is perseverance. "A player needs to have strong self-discipline. This helps a lot in the intensive training," he added.

When he was asked about his proudest moment, Bai quickly responded: "The moment when I became the champion". He was referring to the League of Legends Pro League 2023 Spring Split Championship, which was the most recent award his team won by the time of the interview. "My grandma always watches my competitions, and I feel proud by just thinking that she's watching," Bai said.

With this pride, Bai is motivated and hopeful for the future. "I wish to win all championships ahead," he said.

Online Watch the video by scanning the code.

Z WEEKLY

Di An's *The City of Dragon* trilogy is adapted to television, starring Chinese actress Ma Yili (middle) and actor Bai Yu (left). PHOTO PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Chinese stories connect with the world

Famous author sees a bright future for Chinese young adult literature, reports **Wang Xingwei**.

A love triangle between family members, parent-child disputes, a mystery revolving around the protagonist's birth — these are some highlights of the family drama *Take Us Home*, which began airing on China Central Television's CCTV-8 channel and streaming on online video platform iQiyi's international section in April, reaching around 200 countries and regions worldwide.

Starring award-winning Chinese actress Ma Yili and actor Bai Yu, the drama is adapted from *The City of Dragon* trilogy (2009-2012) by writer Li Di'an, better known by her pen name Di An. The story revolves around three cousins who grew up together. It was once all the rage during the younger days of post-90s readers, selling millions of copies.

"To be honest, I feel a bit awkward [watching it on TV]," said Di An. "I rarely look back on my early works as they are somewhat immature."

Di An said that back then, as a young writer in her 20s, she was desperately trying to express her emotions that had been bottled up inside — confusion, anger and passion — through words that she now thinks were quite extreme. For instance, she designed a series of dramatic plots for the three cousins in *The City of Dragon* trilogy. "The first time I read the whole story from soup to nuts, even I myself thought, 'What a family'!" she said.

Di An PHOTO PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Even now, a decade after the first book in the trilogy was published, many young people can still see themselves in the three cousins. "I wasn't aware of that when I was writing the story, but now it appears that youngsters across different generations will more or less face similar dilemmas or problems," said Di An.

The trilogy became an instant hit right after its publication, which was much to Di An's surprise as her initial intention was simply to write a dramatic family story in her spare time. "Every week, I would receive calls from the publishing house, telling me how many additional copies they had ordered," Di An recalled.

But it happened so fast that Di An wasn't able to wrap her head around it at that time. In fact, she was doing her master's degree in France. Instead of taking the time to enjoy her overnight fame back home, she was anxiously waiting day by day for feedback on her thesis from her supervisor. No one in France knew of the sensation she had stirred up in China.

"As a 25-year-old postgraduate, the only thing that I cared about at that moment was my graduation thesis, the same as other students," she said.

Looking back, Di An said that being abroad at that time and staying away from the spotlight was a good thing for her. It allowed her to keep a clear head when dealing with important life events like finishing school and making the decision to pursue a career in writing.

Over the years, this career choice has taken her far. With several sought-after novels and literary awards, including the People's Literature Award, under her belt, Di An recently published another book called *Sweet Honey*. From the perspective of a little girl raised by her single mother, the book depicts how the girl interacts and finally accepts her mother's boyfriend, leading the readers to rethink the grown-up world.

Some readers say that Di An's approach in this book is much softer than her previous ones, especially when compared with *The City of Dragon* trilogy. Di An ascribes this change to her mental maturity. She said that she grew up together with the characters in her coming-of-age trilogy.

Her new book will be translated into multiple languages and introduced to Belt and Road countries by the Chinese Writers Association. As a storyteller standing on the global stage, Di An sees a bright future for Chinese young adult literature.

From printed books like the award-winning writer Liu Cixin's *The Three-Body Problem* trilogy to online novels including *My Heroic Husband* by Angry Banana (pen name), more Chinese literature works appealing to Gen Zers in China have gradually become known to their peers around the world.

"I think these Chinese stories share the same foundation that connects people around the world. Even written in the Chinese context, they manage to grasp the beauty that all human beings possess inside," Di An said.

Contact the writer at wangxingwei@i21st.cn

Building hope out of adversity

By **MENG WENJIE**
mengwenjie@i21st.cn

Fifteen years ago, on May 12, 2008, an 8.0-magnitude earthquake shook Wenchuan county in Sichuan province, putting a sudden end to the lives of more than 69,000 people. Li Anqiang, then a high school student at Beichuan Middle School in Beichuan, one of the worst ravaged counties in the disaster, was in his physics class. The school building collapsed, leaving him buried in the ruins.

Li was rescued after 24 hours, but his legs, severely crushed, had to be amputated. For months, Li was overwhelmed by depression and isolated himself from others. In order to take care of him, Li's parents had to quit their jobs.

"I had no idea what I would do for the rest of my life. My parents weren't getting any younger and they couldn't be expected to push my wheelchair around every day," Li said. So he plucked up the courage to spend the following five months in rehabilitation and learned how to get around with his prosthetic legs.

Thanks to his prosthetic legs, Li regained the ability to walk. Then he was able to return to school and got admitted to Sichuan University with excellent grades. Upon graduating, he got the opportunity to continue his studies at Rutgers University in New Jersey, the United States. He obtained his master's degree with straight A's before returning to China to work at an educational institution.

Outside of his work, Li shared videos on social media about his life with prosthetic limbs and received many comments from fellow amputees. They wondered how he could walk so well with two above-the-knee prosthetic legs, as some of them found it hard with just one.

That was when it occurred to Li that he could make a career in helping those in need to find suitable prosthetic limbs and train them to walk freely again. So he found a job as a therapist specializing in prosthetic rehabilitation.

"The process of recovery can be extremely tough as it's like a toddler learning to walk," said Li, talking about rehabilitation for people with disabilities.

Moreover, the challenge is just as mental as it is physical. Li recalled one of his patients, a girl named Peng Yali, whose lower leg had been amputated. Peng found it hard watching other newer patients get discharged before her. So Li connected Peng with his female friends who also used below-the-knee prosthetic legs. Their stories inspired Peng and gave her new motivation. Gradually, after almost a year of rehabilitation, Peng was discharged and started working again.

It pains Li to see disabled people not getting out of their homes enough because they cannot move about freely or fear being stared at. This is what drives his work with prostheses and rehabilitation.

"I hope that one day when we walk down the street with prostheses, we are treated no differently to, say, people with glasses," said Li. "I plan to continue helping more people with disabilities to be less disabled, to move about more freely and enjoy life in the way they deserve."

Online
Watch the video by scanning the code.

Li Anqiang PHOTO PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Impressed by the real China

"On the diplomatic stage, China shows respect and emphasizes its friendly nature and objective perspective. It offers many great economic opportunities for developing countries, and it's also committed to promoting regional peace and cross-cultural communication.

Jekaterina Volkova, 29, college student

Jekaterina Volkova PHOTO PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

By **CHEN XUE**
chenxue@i21st.cn

With a father fond of China constantly telling her of its great development potential, Jekaterina Volkova, 29, decided to come to study in China in 2015.

China's rise has long been a popular subject among Western scholars and experts, including in Latvia — Volkova's home country. But this rise is more often than not described as a bad thing, the so-called "China threat", by some forces in Western countries. This is part of the reason that Volkova chose to study international relations at the University of International Business and Economics in Beijing. And what she's already learned there is very different from what she sees in media reports back home.

"On the diplomatic stage, China shows respect and emphasizes its friendly nature and objective perspective. It offers many great economic opportunities for developing countries, and it's also committed to promoting regional peace and cross-cultural communication," said Volkova.

She took Latvia as an example. Located in the heartland of continental Europe and bordering the Baltic Sea to the west, Latvia has long been an important hub for trade in Europe. Now that it's part of China's Belt and Road Initiative, it has a new role in connecting Asia and Europe, a role that comes with new benefits and opportunities.

"What has impressed me most is the opening of China-Europe freight rail services going from Changsha (the capital city of China's Hunan province) to Latvia in April 2022," said Volkova. "Hopefully, both countries can keep developing close cooperation in trade, transport and logistics sectors."

When it comes to China's efforts in maintaining world peace, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) comes to Volkova's mind as it is one of the topics of her PhD thesis.

When the organization was established in 2001, the member states jointly signed the Shanghai Convention against Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism at the first summit. The organization also makes great achievements in regional cooperation in trade, science and technology. In her PhD research, for example, Volkova learned that as of 2021, the 20th anniversary of its foundation, the SCO member economies have produced more than $20 trillion, 13 times more than 20 years ago.

"During my research, I was really surprised by China's wisdom in international relations," said Volkova. "China aims to achieve regional peace by maintaining stability and promoting development through cooperation and dialogue, which is the main achievement of the SCO."

That's why Volkova doesn't see China as a threat at all. "On the contrary, [China's rise] brings many opportunities for people around the world," she said.

Online
Watch the video by scanning the code.

SPORTS

SURFING

Hawaii's wave of controversy

Islanders divided over artificial lagoon in the birthplace of surfing

A surfer practices his moves in a wave pool at Ewa Beach, Hawaii, on May 9. A prominent Hawaiian waterman wants to build another Hawaii wave pool facility using the latest technology to simulate the ideal conditions that elite surfers need to stay competitive. But many native Hawaiians want to stop the project and argue that it is a waste of water and pointless when there are many nearby beaches for surfing. A lawsuit has been filed against the project in a state environmental court by a group of Hawaiians and residents near the proposed site. AP

Brian Keaulana is the quintessential native Hawaiian waterman, well-known in Hawaii and beyond for his deep understanding of the ocean, gifted with surfing and lifeguarding skills passed down from his big-wave rider father.

Now, as one of the islands' standard-bearers of surfing, Keaulana wants to further boost the sport in his homeland by building an artificial wave pool just down the road from the beach — a spot where competitive surfers could always be guaranteed the perfect breaks that are sometimes elusive in nature.

The bold proposal has made waves in Hawaii, particularly among some native Hawaiians, and raised questions about how a modern-day sport followed by millions worldwide fits into the cultural legacy of islanders who have been riding waves for millennia.

The project has landed in court and reflects the unease some native Hawaiians feel about the commercialization of what long has been a cultural touchstone.

"They're profiting off a cultural practice by controlling it by making these wave pools, which are going to destroy the actual beach that is nearby," said Healani Sonoda-Pale, a plaintiff in a civil case seeking to stop the wave pool. "I cannot speak for other Hawaiians. All I can I say is as a Hawaiian ... it goes against my culture."

Surfer and writer Mindy Pennybacker said the controversy highlights a struggle over how to balance tradition with a booming sport. In researching her book *Surfing Sisterhood Hawai'i: Women Reclaiming the Waves*, she learned of the creative ways Hawaiians compensated when there was no surf, including finding standing river waves or sledding down hillsides.

She also sees how wave pools help athletes improve, noting a World Surf League championship tour competition over Memorial Day weekend at a California wave pool developed by pro surfer Kelly Slater.

"The beauty of surfing — and the frustration of surfing at the recreational and competitive level — remains the unpredictability and how surfers need the reflexes to deal with changing conditions," she said.

The lawsuit — filed in state environmental court by a group of Hawaiians and residents near the proposed site — alleges the 7 million-gallon (26-million liter) artificial pool would damage nearshore limu, a type of seaweed, and desecrate *iwi kupuna*, or ancient Hawaiian remains.

Bidding to halt the project, the lawsuit challenges the Hawaii Community Development Authority's approval and finding that it will have no significant environmental impacts. The development authority and the state attorney general's office declined to comment on the lawsuit, which seeks a new environmental review.

A hearing is set for July and it's not clear when a judge might rule.

Sonoda-Pale pointed out that the artificial lagoon would be 2 miles (3.2 kilometers) from a beach called White Plains, long a popular surf spot.

A wave pool recently opened nearby and opponents say another one is unnecessary and a waste of water. But Keaulana remains committed, noting ocean conditions aren't always ideal for learning how to surf or save lives.

Healani Sonoda-Pale has filed a lawsuit against the project. AP

> They're profiting off a cultural practice by controlling it by making these wave pools, which are going to destroy the actual beach that is nearby."
>
> **Healani Sonoda-Pale**, a plaintiff in a civil case seeking to stop the wave pool

One recent afternoon, no one was surfing at Makaha beach in west Oahu, where Keaulana grew up. Conditions were too calm despite Makaha's world-famous reputation for its ferocious shore break.

"The ocean is the greatest treasure that we have," he said, but "it can be flat. It can be big. It can be dirty. It can have, you know, sharks here and there."

He worries Hawaii's Olympic surfing hopefuls are at a disadvantage to competitors who can easily train at one of several surf parks worldwide. A wave pool allows for more time on a surfboard in an hour than most surfers get in the ocean in a week, he said.

"You see these surfers going to these surf parks and catching wave after wave and they are honing their skills and then they go into the ocean when there's a swell," he said. "Boom. They're already primed and ready."

Using the latest technology, the facility would simulate ideal conditions needed to keep top surfers competitive and serve as a "lifesaving lab" for teaching safety skills in a controlled setting, he said.

His business partner, Keno Knieriem, said waves can be customized with a tap on a tablet, noting an electromechanical system would use panels to generate up to 1,000 waves per hour, mimicking ocean swells up to 8 feet (2.4 meters) high. Some 80 surfers could work different waves simultaneously: barrelling waves, big waves, kid-friendly waves, Knieriem said.

"That would be sick," professional surfer Sheldon Paishon said of the details. He grew up surfing at Makaha and now surfs all over the world, and has trained at the Slater wave pool and a Texas one. "When the waves are small ... we could go there and do our thing."

Ikaika Kaulukukui, surf operations manager for the existing wave pool at a facility called Wai Kai, said it has improved his surfing.

"Everyone comes to Hawaii for you know, big winter waves, like we're ... the mecca for big-wave surfing ... but that's not gonna be here ... every day," he said.

Sonoda-Pale, who calls herself a water protector, questioned whether a wave pool is really necessary to excel at surfing. While she surfed in her youth, she's no longer an active surfer.

"I know as a cultural practice that from our histories, when the surf was up, families would drop everything they're doing and go out and surf," she said. "So, the timeline of when to surf, when it is a good time to surf ... was made by nature, was made by Kanaloa," she added, referring to the Hawaiian ocean god.

Knieriem said the project would incorporate water conservation and off-the-grid electricity and feature native plants in its landscaping. Keaulana said a vacant tract in an area outside Honolulu known as Kalaeloa was selected because it wasn't pristine and had been used as an aircraft engine test site.

Besides a surf lagoon, the 19-acre (7.6-hectare) site also would feature rock climbing, beach volleyball, skateboarding and other activities. The proposed facility is eyeing a summer 2024 opening, though it's not clear how the lawsuit could affect the timeline.

"We've met with a number of Hawaiian cultural advisors and conducted extensive archaeological and environmental studies to ensure that we protect and *malama* the site," said a company statement online, using the Hawaiian word that can mean "to take care of".

Keaulana said he's hopeful differences can be worked out with *hoo-ponopono*, a traditional, culture-based form of mediation. Project opponents say they are open to such a meeting.

"I'm more disappointed in myself. I felt — and we felt — that we've pretty much tried to do everything possible," Keaulana said of concerns about the project. "I just feel to be Hawaiian is to meet up and work your differences and problems out."

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Surfing legend Slater still targeting Olympic swansong

Kelly Slater is hoping he can pull off one more miracle as the most remarkable career in surfing draws toward a close, setting his sights on a narrow path to qualification for the Olympics being held next year in Tahiti's thumping tubes.

The 51-year-old American, world champion a record 11 times, was last month granted a wild card for the remainder of the World Surf League's (WSL) 2023 tour after he failed to make the midyear cut.

With WSL rankings taking precedence for Olympic qualification, the reprieve kept alive Slater's ambition to sign off his 30-plus-year professional career at Teahupo'o, the site of the event for the Paris 2024 Games.

"My hopes are still up for it and it would be a real dream come true for me to make that happen," Slater said.

"When I started, we didn't have surfing in the Olympics, so it was never my ultimate goal. That it has presented itself, it just lines up so well for me for when I want to stop competing.

"It would be an almost perfect time for me to call it a day as far as full-time competition."

Surfing joined the Olympics at the delayed Tokyo 2020 Games, with Slater just missing out on making the US team. He is currently well behind John John Florence, Griffin Colapinto and four other countrymen seeking only two places.

Few would write him off quite yet, however.

Slater has won every stop on the world tour among his unprecedented 56 victories and conjured some improbable comebacks since his first professional win as an 18-year-old in 1990.

And one further path to the Olympics is available. A win by the US men's team at the ISA World Surfing Games next year would earn it an additional spot at the Olympics.

American great Kelly Slater rides a wave during the 2008 Billabong Pro tournament in Teahupoo, Tahiti, which will host the surfing competition for the 2024 Paris Olympics. REUTERS

Having won at Teahupo'o five times and made the semifinals there last year, Slater would be an obvious choice to take on the perfect, but dangerous, reef pass.

"I've obviously had a really good record at Teahupo'o," Slater said. "It's a wave that suits my strengths and I know the wave really well."

Missing out on the Olympics would not be the end of the world, Slater added, and he has alternative retirement plans on the cards "in the next year or two".

They would most likely involve a last ride as a professional at Hawaii's iconic Pipeline, where he stunned the world to win for a record eighth time last year.

"There are a lot of good outs for me — there's no bad path," said Slater, speaking ahead of the launch of a new company making sandals inspired by turtle shells and the moon.

"If I don't make the Olympics maybe I help out in some capacity there with the guys that do."

As well as designing sandals, surfboards, surf fins and a range of clothing, Slater also had a hand in designing groundbreaking wave-pool technology that he believes could play a role in Olympic competitions of the future.

The pools generate near-identical waves to order, taking out some of the luck factor in ocean surfing and allowing a more "apples to apples" comparison of skills, Slater said.

While pools also make scheduling of events much easier, the lure of the ocean is hard to resist for a man who has spent so much time in it.

"As far as fairness goes, it makes a lot of sense," he said. "But surfing is an artistic, creative thing and you're trying to decipher what nature throws at you."

REUTERS

SPORTS

TENNIS

Zhang aces opener to serve up history for China

Veteran delivers another breakthrough with flying start in Paris

PARIS — For the first time in the Open era, a Chinese mainland player has secured a place in the second round of the men's singles draw at the French Open. In the latest in a series of recent breakthroughs for Chinese men on the ATP Tour, Zhang Zhizhen on Monday advanced past Serbia's Dusan Lajovic, who was forced to retire due to injury with Zhang leading 6-1, 4-1 at the time.

Amid waving Chinese flags on Court 5 at Roland Garros, Zhang immediately took a stranglehold on the match, breaking Lajovic four times to race into a one-set lead.

The 27-year-old Zhang broke in the fourth game of the second to lead 4-1, after which Lajovic was unable to continue playing.

"I performed well today, I kept my cool at crucial moments and made very few unforced errors," said Zhang, who had lost his previous three Grand Slam first-round matches, all in five sets.

"I didn't envision my first Grand Slam main-draw win to be like this, but such is life. You never know what will happen, but you have to be ready."

Zhang will next face Thiago Agustin Tirante, the world No 153 from Argentina, who produced an upset by defeating Dutch 25th seed Botic van de Zandschulp 6-2, 4-6, 6-3, 6-4.

World No 71 Zhang is in the form of his life, becoming the first Chinese mainland player to reach the quarterfinals of an ATP 1000 Masters tournament in Madrid earlier this month.

"We had so many people eagerly awaiting our first win. One step at a time, and then we can accumulate many wins," added Zhang.

Born in Shanghai, Zhang was one of three Chinese in the men's singles main draw at the clay-court Grand Slam this year.

Earlier on Monday, qualifier Shang Juncheng, the youngest of the trio at 18, was a set away from claiming his first win at a major before losing an epic encounter 4-6, 2-6, 6-2, 6-3, 6-1 to Peru's Juan Pablo Varillas.

China's Zhang Zhizhen poses for a selfie with fans after his victory over Serbia's Dusan Lajovic at the French Open on Monday. AFP

"After the second set, I struggled physically because I haven't been training much recently," said Shang, who revealed he had recently been diagnosed with a mononucleosis infection.

"I was feeling exhausted after playing for only 10 minutes. It (the infection) has been affecting me a lot recently, even disrupting my sleep. So, I was just happy to be here, to be honest," Shang added.

Shang looked poised to progress to round two when he broke Varillas in the fourth and eighth games of the second set to take a two-set lead.

> I didn't envision my first Grand Slam main-draw win to be like this, but such is life. You never know what will happen, but you have to be ready."
>
> **Zhang Zhizhen**

But Varillas, ranked 94th, staged a strong comeback while Shang grappled with a left-wrist injury that forced him to call for a medical timeout in the fifth set.

The world No 200 failed to earn a single break in the remaining three sets as his opponent turned the tide to clinch his first Grand Slam win.

Varillas will next face Spanish veteran Roberto Bautista Agut, seeded 19th, who dispatched another Chinese player, Wu Yibing, 7-6 (4), 6-1, 6-1.

"This is my first year competing in ATP events on clay. Overall, it hasn't been too bad. At least I managed to win some matches," said Wu, who reached the quarterfinals in Geneva the week prior to the French Open.

The 23-year-old arrived in Paris as the highest-ranked Chinese men's player at No 54.

Last year, Wu became the first male Chinese mainland player to claim a Grand Slam main-draw win in the Open era at the US Open. He racked up another milestone in February, when he became the first Chinese player to win an ATP Tour title, defeating John Isner in the final of the Dallas Open.

Wu will now team up with Argentina's Pedro Cachin to compete in the men's doubles.

XINHUA

Djokovic, Alcaraz safely through, but rivals sense chinks in armor

PARIS — You might assume that the opponents for Carlos Alcaraz and Novak Djokovic in the French Open's first round would come away from their straight-sets defeats on Monday feeling too overwhelmed by the play of the two tournament favorites.

You would be wrong.

Forget the scores and the point-by-point particulars on a windy day at Roland Garros for a moment. Of course it turned out that No 1-seeded Alcaraz, the reigning US Open champion, beat 159th-ranked qualifier Flavio Cobolli, a 21-year-old from Florence, Italy. And of course it turned out that No 3 Djokovic, a 22-time major winner, got past 114th-ranked Aleksandar Kovacevic, a 24-year-old who grew up in New York City and is now based in Florida.

And naturally, both Cobolli and Kovacevic acknowledged feeling a bit jittery at the outset of what were their Grand Slam debuts in huge arenas against a couple of elite players.

"I started in a bit of a daze," Cobolli said after his 6-0, 6-2, 7-5 loss, "because of the emotions."

"A couple of times there, I did look up and take it all in. I made sure of that, because this is the kind of experience I'll definitely hold onto forever," Kovacevic said after his 6-3, 6-2, 7-6 (1) loss. "It's not the best thing in the world to get lost in the crowd. You start to really look at everyone that's there — and that's when the nerves hit."

But what both of them wanted to make clear afterward was that, yes, Alcaraz and Djokovic are exceptionally talented, but, no, it did not seem to be impossible to find openings to exploit.

"It's definitely intimidating. Watching him on TV growing up, it's hard not to look past that and knowing what he's accomplished.

Carlos Alcaraz (left) and Novak Djokovic celebrate their first-round victories at the French Open on Monday. REUTERS

But from a tennis standpoint, it's not otherworldly," said Kovacevic, who was 7 when he first met Djokovic and later practiced with him during the 2021 US Open after playing college tennis at the University of Illinois.

"The things he does well, he does unbelievably well, but the ball that he hits — it's not blowing me completely off the court, which was honestly somewhat surprising."

Other seeded men advancing on Day 2 in Paris included No 8 Jannik Sinner, No 12 Frances Tiafoe, No 14 Cam Norrie and No 15 Borna Coric. Among the seeded women moving into the second round: No 5 Caroline Garcia, No 14 Beatriz Haddad Maia, No 20 Madison Keys and No 22 Donna Vekic. Seeds on the way out included No 10 Petra Kvitova, No 12 Belinda Bencic and No 16 Karolina Pliskova in the women's bracket, along with No 10 Felix Auger-Aliassime and No 25 Botic van de Zandschulp in the men's.

With 14-time champion Rafael Nadal sidelined by a hip injury, Alcaraz and Djokovic are considered the favorites for the men's title and could meet in the semifinals. If Djokovic wins the trophy, he would earn his 23rd at a Slam and break the tie for the men's record he and Nadal currently share.

Cobolli's first career match on the lower-level ATP Challenger Tour was a loss in qualifying against Alcaraz in Italy in August 2000. Cobolli chuckled on Monday while recalling that encounter and pointing out that, while both have grown as players since then, "he's grown more".

"It's impressive how he handles himself on important points. That's one of his best qualities. His ball speed is faster than most players in this tournament. It's so difficult to get him in trouble," Cobolli said. "But like all of us human beings, he does have his weaker aspects."

Which, perhaps, was why both of these contests were lopsided at the beginning — "At the start of the match," Alcaraz said, "I felt invincible — and included a bit of intrigue down the stretch." Alcaraz held three match points to close things at 5-3 in the third set but couldn't convert, then found himself at 5-all minutes later. Djokovic served to end his match at 5-4 in the third but got broken there to also sit at 5-all.

"Made me work for my victory," Djokovic said.

In both instances, to the surprise of no one, the higher-rated player steadied himself and sealed the deal.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

BASKETBALL

Miami's dream run reaches Finals as Celtics comeback crumbles

BOSTON, Massachusetts — The Miami Heat sustained a gut-wrenching, last-second loss on their third attempt to clinch the Eastern Conference finals, tilting momentum in favor of the Boston Celtics.

However, the Heat who had to take the play-in route to even reach the playoffs, and then upset the top-seeded Milwaukee Bucks to fuel their postseason run, found another gear in their seemingly never-ending fountain of resiliency.

Series MVP Jimmy Butler scored 28 points, Caleb Martin added 26 and the Heat became the second No 8 seed to reach the NBA Finals by posting a convincing 103-84 victory over the host Celtics in Game 7 on Monday night.

Miami was wobbling after a 104-103 setback on Saturday that featured Boston's Derrick White scoring on a putback just as time expired, evening the best-of-seven series.

Yet even the raucous home-court atmosphere in Boston couldn't prevent the Heat from reaching the NBA Finals for the second time in four seasons.

"That could puncture a team's spirit," Heat coach Erik Spoelstra said of the Game 6 loss. "But instead, it drove us to more resolve to try to get the job done."

Bam Adebayo recorded 12 points, 10 rebounds and seven assists as Miami finished the job. Teams that held a 3-0 series lead improved to 151-0 all-time in the NBA playoffs.

Jaylen Brown had 19 points and eight rebounds and White scored 18 points for second-seeded Boston, which was just the fourth team in NBA history to force a Game 7 after losing the first three games.

Jayson Tatum had 14 points and 11 rebounds for the Celtics, but he sprained his left ankle during the game's first possession and hobbled throughout the contest.

"That was tough because it kind of impacted me the rest of the night," Tatum said. "It swelled up. It was frustrating that I was a shell of myself. It was tough to move. It was frustrating, especially happening on the first play."

The Heat will face the Western Conference champion Denver Nuggets in the NBA Finals. Game 1 is Thursday in Denver.

"Nobody's satisfied. We haven't done anything," said Butler, who averaged 24.7 points, 7.6 rebounds, 6.1 assists and 2.6 steals in the series.

Miami's Jimmy Butler holds the series MVP trophy after Monday's Game 7 East finals win at Boston. USA TODAY SPORTS VIA REUTERS

"We don't play just to win the Eastern Conference. We play to win the whole thing."

The New York Knicks (1999 postseason) were the only other No 8 seed to reach the NBA Finals.

Meanwhile, the Celtics struggled throughout the do-or-die game.

"I thought we played tight," Boston guard Malcolm Brogdon said. "When you play that way, it makes you hesitant on both ends of the ball. I thought Miami played the opposite. I thought they played loose."

The other three teams to force a Game 7 after falling behind 3-0 were the New York Knicks (lost to the Rochester Royals in the 1951 Finals), Denver Nuggets (fell to the Utah Jazz in the 1994 second round) and Portland Trail Blazers (lost to the Dallas Mavericks in the 2003 first round).

Miami shot 48.8 percent from the field, including 14 of 28 from 3-point range. Duncan Robinson and Gabe Vincent added 10 points apiece. Martin made four 3s and collected 10 rebounds and Butler also had seven rebounds, six assists and three steals.

The Celtics connected on 39 percent of their shots and were 9 of 42 (21.4 percent) from behind the arc. Boston went 16 of 77 (20.8 percent) from 3-point range over the final two games of the series.

Brown shot just 8-for-23 from the floor, 1-for-9 from long distance, and had eight turnovers. "We failed. I failed," Brown said. "We let the whole city down."

Title showdown

Miami has three players with championships — Udonis Haslem has been part of all three Heat titles, Kevin Love won a championship with Cleveland and Kyle Lowry got a ring with Toronto. The Nuggets have one champion on their roster; Denver's Kentavious Caldwell-Pope got one with the Lakers at the NBA's restart bubble in 2020 against the Heat.

Also back from that Heat team: Butler, Adebayo, Duncan Robinson, Tyler Herro and Gabe Vincent. The only Denver player besides Caldwell-Pope with NBA Finals experience is Jeff Green, who played in the title series alongside Love with Cleveland in 2018.

So, most players will be seeking their first ring. Haslem is trying to end his career with a fourth, and Lowry is among the lucky few who are trying to smudge the Larry O'Brien Trophy for the second time.

He remembers how long it took him in 2019, after the Raptors won their title, to start thinking about winning his next one.

"Maybe like the day after," Lowry said. "And every champion, every NBA champion, would tell you this: There's a high that you never have felt and you want that high again. And there's nothing like that."

Denver swept both games against Miami in the regular season. And both sides will inevitably say that those games won't matter much starting on Thursday.

"The Heat are playing an unbelievable high level," Nuggets coach Michael Malone said. "Jimmy Butler, what he's been doing since round one against Milwaukee, continued that round two against New York and now what he's doing against Boston is just historic in nature. And Erik Spoelstra ... obviously Spo is one of the best coaches in the league, someone who I have a tremendous amount of respect for as a coach but also just as a friend."

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